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Self-Reflexivity and Cinematic Individuation: Abject Figures and Viewers in Contemporary Hollywood Filmmaking

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THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE QUALIFICATION OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY,

FILM STUDIES DEPARTMENT, KING'S COLLEGE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON JUNE

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Reading through these pages I can see the extent to which I have worked though my thinking *by writing*. I can see the sutures, the sticky tape, and the jerry-rigging; the moments of intellectual breakthrough and the conceptual mirages. What appears to me as a three-year-old palimpsest hopefully reads fluently and coherently to fresh eyes.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements…… i

Table of contents……..... ii

List of figures……. iii

INTRODUCTION……..... **1**

CHAPTER 1 – **Metafiction in *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* and *Adaptation*** **49**

CHAPTER 2 – **Man is Sick: Death, Music, and Will to Power in *Ivansxtc*** **118**

CHAPTER 3 – **Behind the Marketplace: Assemblage, Performance, and Schizoanalysis in *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire***…… **160**

CHAPTER 4 – **Ennui, Pilgrimage, Circuitry, and Magical Thinking in *Somewhere* and *Knight of Cups***…… **234**

CONCLUSION……... **294**

Filmography…… **308**

Bibliography…… **317**

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure No.	Figure Title	Page No.
1.1	The positioning of the video monitor means that there are two versions of Heather in the frame. This also shows an impossible view of her in that we can see both the front and back of her head simultaneously.	**66**
1.2	In this setup the angle is slightly altered in order to achieve the effect of Heather staring out of the monitor directly into the camera.	**66**
1.3	As Englund plays to the gallery he casts a portentous shadow, that of Freddy, across Heather's face.	**68**
1.4	Robert Englund (in Freddy costume) makes abstract patterns and shadows in the gleam of the spotlight. This shot is a visual reference to a scene in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) where a journalist waves his arms in front of the beam from a film projector.	**69**
1.5	A California sunset reflects off Wes Craven's pool in Hollywood Hills.	**76**
1.6	Craven's computer screen reveals that either the script is writing itself, or that reality is pre-scripted.	**78**
1.7	Having accepted her 'role' as Nancy, Heather suddenly appears in a different costume.	**83**
1.8	A very similar outfit to the one she wore at the climax of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.	**83**
1.9	Her house is now the same as the original Elm Street house where the Thompsons lived.	**84**
1.10	Heather comes face-to-face with her younger self, similarly attired, as the TV plays *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.	**85**
1.11	Freddy's domain evokes Hieronymus Bosch and M. C. Escher.	**85**
1.12	In particular Bosch's *Christ in Limbo* (circa. 1575). This visual reference suggests that Freddy's realm is not Hell, but a liminal world between earth and the underworld.	**86**

1.13	Heather finds the screenplay that not only narrates her actions but also her inner thoughts.	**87**
1.14	Craven's final message to Heather.	**88**
1.15	The audience can now read, hear, and see the end of the film.	**88**
1.16	They can also read the beginning, as the narrative appears to restart.	**89**
1.17	Charlie stares open mouthed, his expression frozen whilst his internal monologue rages within.	**105**
1.18	Charlie drives away as the film ends with this view of a busy LA street.	**109**
1.19	The focal length changes as time-lapse filmed daisies fill the foreground.	**109**
1.20	As the traffic also becomes time-lapsed, so does day turn to night. The shallow depth shallow depth of field turns the street lights into floating orbs of colour.	**109**
2.1	Predawn Los Angeles.	**138**
2.2	A superimposition fades from one movie theater to another.	**138**
2.3	The silhouette of the bare trees against the morning sun is symbolic of Ivan's diseased lungs.	**139**
2.4	A low-angle shot captures the sun shining through lawn sprinklers.	**139**
2.5	Deep focus captures the famous sign in the background.	**140**
2.6	Two doors that symbolise potential choices.	**140**
2.7	The camera is pointed at the sun to create an abstract play of light shining through leaves.	**141**
2.8	The film includes its 'author'.	**142**
2.9	And suggests that a character within the film is reading the novella.	**142**
2.10	Through the strobe lighting Ivan's ecstasy/agony is revealed.	**148**
2.11	Ivan presents a Nietzschean view.	**152**
2.12	The framing in this shot evokes Christ-like parallels.	**153**
2.13	The nurse is framed like a cut-out in this shot.	**154**
2.14	The closed curtain and door create abstract white lines against the darkened room.	**154**

2.15	Ivan's last comfort.	**158**
3.1	A table showing the 'straightened' narrative of *Mulholland Drive*. The main 'dream' section of the film is reduced to a single plot 'step'.	**169**
3.2	The collage of dancers features three overlapping image planes: the figures, the silhouettes, and the purple screen.	**180**
3.3	The abject appearance of 'the bum'.	**182**
3.4	Auditions for *The Sylvia North Story* involve miming to 1960s pop songs in a studio.	**184**
3.5	The recording booth is revealed to be a set on a studio lot.	**184**
3.6	Adam Kesher notices Betty.	**185**
3.7	Betty returns Adam's gaze.	**185**
3.8	Camilla Rhodes performs Linda Scott's 'Every Little Star' for her audition.	**186**
3.9	The extreme close-up of Betty intensifies her gaze.	**187**
3.10	Which is matched in turn by Adam.	**187**
3.11	The bum toys with the blue box.	**195**
3.12	The unsettling elderly couple emerge from the bag as homunculi. They are sped-up, hence the blurred resolution of this still.	**195**
3.13	They enter Diane's apartment…	**196**
3.14	Grow to full size…	**197**
3.15	And terrify Diane to the point of suicide.	**197**
3.16	The literal 'alley behind the marketplace'.	**211**
3.17	The ominous door that seems to be a portal into a realm of performance and potential.	**212**
3.18	In the first dance, the Valley Girls dance to Little Eva's 'Loco-motion' in the pink room.	**215**
3.19	In the second dance, the pink room women dance to Etta James' 'At Last'.	**217**
3.20	The third dance is a kind of schizoanalytic breakdown.	**219**

3.21	This breakdown is in fact a breakthrough, which leads Nikki/Susan into the next stage of assemblage.	**220**
3.22	Nikki's distorted face during her horrifying vision.	**222**
3.23	When Nikki shoots the phantom, his face turns into a distorted version of her own.	**223**
3.24	She shoots him again and causes this horrific and empty apparition.	**224**
3.25	The Lost Girl's TV shows her meeting Nikki. The monitor in frame left shows the same picture.	**225**
3.26	As Nikki and the Lost Girl kiss, Nikki slowly fades away.	**225**
3.27	A plethora of characters perform to Nina Simone's 'Sinnerman'.	**228**
4.1	Johnny sits with his face coated in modelling clay in the prosthetics studio.	**248**
4.2	The opening static shot shows displays a racetrack, a desert, and a horizon in a series of abstract lines.	**250**
4.3	The introduction of Johnny Marco creates a bathetic contrast: the movie star and his expensive toy dwarfed by the horizontal lines of the landscape.	**250**
4.4	Johnny relinquishes the safety of the hotel, the city, and finally his car to head off into an unknown but promising future.	**252**
4.5	Cleo performs in a long shot.	**254**
4.6	Johnny is distracted by his phone.	**254**
4.7	When the camera cuts back to Cleo the framing is tighter: a three-quarter shot.	**255**
4.8	The camera's closer attention is mirrored by Johnny, who now cannot help but watch.	**255**
4.9	The beginning of the shot shows Johnny and Cleo languidly sunbathing.	**259**
4.10	The end of a slow zoom-out shows Johnny and Cleo by the pool amongst some other guests, with a backdrop of plants.	**259**
4.11	The heavenly light that appears frequently throughout the film.	**271**

4.12	The viewer is introduced to Rick and the recurring light motif in a desert.	**280**
4.13	NASA footage of the Earth shows the aurora borealis.	**280**
4.14	The light appears once more, at the end of the tunnel…	**280**
4.15	Grainy videotape footage struggles to capture the colours of the sunset but creates an impressionistic picture.	**281**
4.16	This contrasts with the high-definition GoPro footage that follows it.	**282**
4.17	Rick stares into space dissected by multiple frames.	**282**
4.18	The colours, windows, and screens lend this scene a Pop Art, or neo-noir sheen.	**283**
4.19	The artist's film shows a woman using paint and cut out photographs to create a series of costumes and masks.	**283**
4.20	Rick is caught in the heavenly light as he peruses the strip club.	**287**
4.21	The light bears witness to Rick's first meeting with Karen.	**287**
4.22	A two-shot? Or a three-shot given the prevalence of that light?	**287**
4.23	A renewed focus in the light revives Burial's music on the score.	**288**

Introduction

This is a study of contemporary Hollywood. Thus, this is a study of Hollywood during an epoch of socio-political uncertainty. What is our connection to Hollywood and cinema in such a period, and how is this connection forged? Throughout the following pages you will be presented with onscreen experiences of failure, depression, boredom, and anxiety. An abject cinematic milieu which self-reflexively diagnose a corresponding sense of psychological abjection endemic amongst spectators in Western society. Hence this thesis examines several types of self-reflexive film, but discovers that the traditional theories arising from, and approaches to, self-reflexivity fail to contend with the new paradigm of abject spectators and films. Using the concept of 'cinematic individuation', I propose ways in which this 'failure' can be repackaged into productive encounters between spectators and films. Ultimately this thesis explores the ways in which we relate to cinema in troubling times.

Thomas Elsaesser argues:

> art and commerce are always in communication with each other. What makes the cinema unique is that it is an art form owing its existence to the particular interplay of capitalism and the state, at any given point in time. Perhaps more than any other creative practice, then, the cinema's potential and performance, its identity and vitality are closely aligned with the changing relations between these forces.[1]

Cinema will always communicate something about the political and commercial culture at the time of its creation. But in a climate of uncertainty, mainstream cinema becomes equally uncertain in its outlook. Whilst the New Hollywood period of American cinema in the 1960s and 1970s saw a trend for characters beset by spiritual ennui, there was also focused and directed protest and anger. Now we only seem to experience the ennui, in the guise of glazed

[1] Elsaesser, 'American Auteur Cinema', 67.

irony. How might one access a more progressive conception of Hollywood? How can viewership be turned into an active and political tool?

I propose that a solution to these questions can be sought in self-reflexivity. Historically, self-reflexive film has been regarded as a form of sociopolitical intervention in the Brechtian mode: the supposed alienating effect allows the spectator a cognitive space within which they can properly analyse the ideological content and arguments of an artwork. Metafictional projects are classically seen as aiming to disrupt the reality-claims of all artworks.[2] Such a viewpoint takes the effectiveness of the distancing effect of self-reflexivity as a given and ignores the possibility that the opposite effect could be achieved, or that both positions can be held at once. This thesis argues that by using self-reflexive techniques and 'traditional' generators of affect (music, for example), cinema can reconfigure, rewrite, and reinvent viewers' subjectivity through a process I term 'cinematic individuation' I will provide a detailed definition of this concept later in this introduction but for the time being we can understand this as a process wherein a film connects with a viewer on a visceral level whilst simultaneously alienating them intellectually. This sensation of being emotionally affected whilst being cognitively engaged allows viewers a moment of self-reflexivity where they can become aware of how they individuate into a network of interdependent relationships

Self-reflexivity in art has been traditionally used as a device used to disrupt established forms and to directly challenge its viewer. In Diego Velázquez's 1656 painting *Las Meninas* a reflection in a mirror shows two figures to be occupying the point-of-view of the spectator. This inspired French writer André Gide to transpose the term *mise-en-abyme* from its original heraldic context (a small shield design within a larger shield).[3] Gide extends

[2] See, for instance, Robert Stam's classic scholarly work: *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*. Stam's overriding argument is that meta-narratives disrupt the claim to mimesis of any text.
[3] Gide, *Journals 1889-1949*, 30 – 31.

his term to cover the play-within-the-play in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1609) and the fictional novel *The Mad Trist* that is read in Edgar Allen Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839). Literary reflexivity is also embedded in Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, the genesis of the modern novel, which is highly intertextual and includes several metafictional framing devices. A further layer of artifice is added to *Don Quixote* by Jorge Luis Borges' 'Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*' [Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*, 1939]. Borges' story is itself referenced in Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985) and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000): a chain of increasing intertextual and metafictional layers. Surrealist art in the 1920s and 1930s was often highly self-reflexive. Perhaps the most well-known instance is René Magritte's *La trahison des images* [*The Treachery of Images*, 1928-29] which depicts a pipe with the accompanying legend: '*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*'. In music, one might trace the modern practice of sampling to the long list of homages and 'variations-on-a-theme' in classical music. For example, Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (1910) makes use of the main melody of the third of nine psalm tunes that Thomas Tallis composed for the Archbishop of Canterbury Matthew Parker's metrical psalter in 1567.

Cinema's tendency to ruminate upon its own status and creation is almost as old as the medium itself, Louis Lumière having turned the camera to the site of production in *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* [*Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon*] in 1895. Reflexive playfulness frequently features in silent comedies such as *Sherlock Jr*. (Buster Keaton, 1924) and animations like *Duck Amuck* (Chuck Jones, 1953). Direct address and fourth-wall breaking in Federico Fellini and Jean-Luc Godard's films in turn inspired Japanese New Wave filmmakers such as Nagisa Ōshima, Shūji Terayama, and Kōji Wakamatsu. More recently, global auteurs like Abbas Kiarostami, Michael Haneke, and Asghar Farhadi frequently disrupt the narrative flow and fictional world of their films in

provocative and playful ways (constructed documentary, revelation of a camera crew, 'rewinding' the film, etc.).

Academic responses to cinematic self-reflexivity have tended to correspond with Robert Stam's oft-referenced work on the subject: 'They [reflexive films] share a playful, parodic, and disruptive relation to established norms and conventions. They demystify fictions, and our naïve faith in fictions, and make of this demystification a source for new fictions.'[4] The problem with this definition, written over three decades ago during the height of the literary postmodern movement, is that the structures of narrative fictions are so thoroughly deconstructed and 'meme-ified' by online communities that there is no need to 'demystify' them further. Post-truth culture and media have awakened us to the realisation that it was not our belief in fictions that was naïve but, rather, our trust of facts; we would do worse at this stage than to throw our lot in with a fiction. Post-truth politics ('fake news') is currently associated with right-wing rhetoric. When French writer, populist, and staunch supporter of ethnic purity Renaud Camus was embarrassed in a radio interview by an opponent deploying 'facts' and 'statistics' he swiftly took to Twitter (platform of choice for 'after-the-fact' thinkers) to declare 'since when, in history, did a people need "science" to decide whether or not it was invaded and occupied?'[5] Efforts are being made to reduce the impact and spread of fake news through regulations on social media, fact checking, and the reduction of spam bots. Given that such measures seem insufficient, perhaps now is the time to consider how the loss of trust in facts might be co-opted for progressive and beneficial means. Possibly we should consider John Keats' 'negative capability': the state 'of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason', that

[4] Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*, xi.
[5] Williams, 'The French Origins of "You will not replace us"'.

allows people to pursue artistic beauty even as it leads one through intellectual and rational dissonance.[6]

Stam's proposition is indicative of a widely used critical approach which lies within a traditional paradigm. Whilst this paradigm permits the existence of experimental techniques and 'rule-breaking' under the guise of modernism or postmodernism, it remains conservative due to an adherence to subject-object relations: a spectator-subject watching a film-object. However, what postmodern art really culminated in was a crisis in subjectivity engendered through the solidification of the neo-liberal project in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The increasing privatisation of industry and the public sector and the incessant shift in power from governments to the banks in traditional economic powers, coupled with the emergence of oligarch-driven hyper-capitalist regimes in the former 'second world', South and East Asia, and the Gulf States, led to ludicrous wealth discrepancies and an unsustainable global economy ever tottering on the brink of collapse. This in turn contributed greatly to a current global sociopolitical climate of uncertainty as seen in the return of populist politics and the anxiety of cultures who can no longer assume their future continuation with any confidence.

A more suitable approach to self-reflexivity in the face of these conditions is found in Christian Metz's final book, *Énonciation impersonnelle, ou, Le site du film* [*Impersonal Enunciation, or the Place of Film*, 1991]. Here, Metz is not interested in what a film is trying to tell us (our readings or interpretations), but the act of communication (enunciation) itself. Metz presents a non-exhaustive taxonomy of enunciative tropes in self-reflexive filmmaking which includes look to camera, voice-off, titles, secondary screens and frames, mirrors, revealing the camera, films within films, POV, the I-voice, enunciation and style, and neutral images and sounds (Metz is not sure whether these are possible).[7]

---

[6] From a letter to his brothers in 1817 by John Keats in *The Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats, Cambridge Edition*, 277.
[7] Metz, *Impersonal Enunciation*, 139.

The key departure from older theories on reflexivity, is that Metz does away with the pretence that disruptive reflexive tropes are particularly disruptive for the audience: 'The spectator cannot lose sight of the fact, not entirely anyway, that he is watching a film. So he is always conscious of enunciation in one way or another.'[8] For example, if you reveal the camera, the viewer is aware on some level that there must be another camera filming the reveal (even in a mirror shot which Metz would claim simply puts the camera into another mediated space) which 'necessarily remains in a place that is fundamentally beyond'.[9] So I will not pretend that such moments cause the floor to fall out from beneath our feet. But they remain nudging moments of enunciation. Metz admits that the devices he evaluates do trouble the reality effect of a film. They can 'still disturb the realistic or fantastical purr of the diegesis and of the subjective views that are intertwined with it…. These are like complimentary wake-up calls for the spectator, jolts of the film'.[10]

Abjection Expressionism

If the general sense of subjectivity is itself fundamentally undermined, then it seems necessary to address the films that predicted this, that are responding to it, and that are suggesting new paths, with an approach that does not assume the classical subject-object dyad as a given, and that moves towards a third state: abjection.

Commonly used in a pejorative sense to describe failure, debasement, and various nadirs of being, abjection's widespread usage in psychoanalytic theory stems from Julia Kristeva's seminal book *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* [*Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, 1982]. For Kristeva, abjection is a crucial part of subject formation which allows us to

[8] Metz.
[9] Metz, 70.
[10] Metz, 134.

demark a boundary between self and other. Conversely, the negative associations with abjection and abject material occur because it also troubles these boundaries. Kristeva describes abjection as that which 'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules.'[11] The examples that Kristeva uses in her foundational text are now closely associated with the theory itself. She writes of waste material (faeces and menstrual blood), spoiled food, and human corpses (which are simultaneously human and non-human). These images have been pervasive and thus, in film studies, one often encounters the abject in association with horror and extreme cinema. Barbara Creed's influential article 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection' (1986) was an early example of this application which has continued in recent books by Rina Arya and Kate Goodnow which explore horror cinema's relation to abjection.[12]

Whilst this relation between horror and abjection, and filth and abjection manifests in this thesis in discussions of *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (Wes Craven, 1994) in Chapter 1 and *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001) in Chapter 3, my use of the term is generally a departure from tangible disgust. Although Kristeva's examples refer to these states, her theory is more abstract and wider-ranging. She suggests that 'we may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity.'[13] Abjection in my thesis refers to moments where the subject and object relation is rendered indistinct, or is used to describe a variety of liminal positions. Thus I use abjection to describe situations, locations, and characters who may not strike readers as abject in an orthodox sense.

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[11] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[12] Creed's article was originally published in *Screen*, vol. 27, issue 1 (Jan/Feb 1986): 44-71. It formed the basis of her later book study: *The Monstrous-feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993). See also Rina Arya, *Abjection and Representation* and Katherine J. Goodnow, *Kristeva in Focus*.
[13] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.

This is not a radical departure from Kristeva but it is a reconfiguration of some of the less visceral passages from *Powers of Horror*. In particular my use of her work stems from her concept of 'the abjection of the self'. She outlines this as 'the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundation of its own being.'[14] If self-abjection is then the realisation that all objects form part of what is perceived as the subject, we can say that it is a state where these definitions are fundamentally unstable. Kristeva describes a person who resides in this state 'a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing.'[15] To be a 'deject' is not necessarily to be filthy—but it does infer abjection. In Chapter 4 we will encounter depressed wanderers straying from their bearings in *Somewhere* (Sofia Coppola, 2010) and *Knight of Cups* (Terrence Malick, 2015). Not abjected but self-abjected.

But the state of dejection precedes the possibility of new beginnings. Kristeva continues: 'the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines—for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject—constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh.'[16] The deject—or state of self-abjection—involves a dissolution of one's sense of subjectivity (solidity) but potentially leads to a reconfiguration of subjectivity (to start afresh). In this sense the experience of self-abjection, although difficult, is not always undesirable. Indeed, throughout this thesis I attempt to highlight moments where abjection might be a positive process of re-wiring subjectivity into a more productive form. This 'positive abjection' is even present in the recent work by Arya and Goodnow, even if only through passing mentions. Arya posits Randall McMurphy (Jack Nicholson) as protesting societal structures in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Miloš Forman, 1975) by crossing

[14] Kristeva, 5.
[15] Kristeva, 8.
[16] Kristeva.

prohibited boundaries and thus 'mapping abject spaces.'[17] Goodnow (still focusing on typically abject matter) acquiesces that some 'contact with what is abject—is invigorating, life-enhancing, and essential for renewal. Too much, however, can be confusing, overwhelming, even destructive.'[18] Self-abjection, or encounters with abject material, can be positive but are not without peril. The negative conditions of abjection are sometimes taken as given, and here it is often presented as positive, but it is not inherently one or the other. Positive instances are referred to in these chapters as 'abject expressionism'—abjection that produces/expresses something new. This is somewhat aligned with the collective, 'Laboria Cuboniks', who published a manifesto entitled 'Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation' online in 2015. The manifesto argues that Xenofeminism 'seizes alienation as an impetus to generate new worlds. We are all alienated—but have we ever been otherwise? It is through, and not despite, our alienated condition that we can free ourselves from the muck of immediacy.'[19]

The case studies of this thesis often posit a transference of abjection (or the deject) from onscreen events and experiences to the viewer. This is facilitated by cinematic individuation. Another way of framing this process is what Enrique Dussel termed 'commiseration':

> placing oneself with (cum) someone in misery (miser). The ethos of liberation is other-directed pulsion or metaphysical justice; it is love of the other as other, as exteriority; love of the oppressed—not, however, as oppressed but as subject of exteriority. The traumatic condition of the human being endowed with freedom, the other, reduced to being an instrument in a system, is rightly called misery. To discover the other as other and place-oneself-together-with that person's misery, to experience as one's own the contradiction between being free and having to endure slavery, being distinct and someone and at the same time only a different internal part; to hurt from the pain of this cleavage is the first attitude of the ethos of liberation. It is not friendship or fellowship

[17] Arya, *Abjection and Representation*, 145.
[18] Goodnow, *Kristeva in Focus*, 65.
[19] Laboria Cuboniks, 'Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation'.

> (among equals) but love of the oppressed because of their real dignity as exteriority.[20]

Just as one must be willing to encounter abjection if one desires change, Dussel's concept involves a degree of openness and effort on behalf of the viewer (for my purposes). The result of accepting the other as oneself is abject, but it is hard to conceive of commiseration as being framed as negatively as abjection.

These films ask questions as to what subjectivity and individuality mean in contemporary cinema and, by extension, society. However, these films are no longer able to properly establish what this subjectivity is, nor are they capable of forming a coherent revolutionary movement. Whilst they perform diagnoses, the films themselves are symptoms of abject identities (figures made abhorrent, hopeless, or unbearable due to a loss of subjectivity), and of an industry that produces abjection. Many of the abject characters in my corpus are male, and most are white. This is not to say that these films are ignorant of, or wilfully eliminating difference. Rather, Hollywood's self-diagnosis displays a fixation of the erasure of difference—in Jacques Derrida's meaning of that which is made more visible by its omission (i.e. whilst non-hegemonic identities may be largely absent, this absence returns as an ephemeral presence precisely due to their non-inclusion within the film).[21] Later chapters of this thesis explore films such as Lynch's *Inland Empire* and Malick's *Knight of Cups* which bring their white (Hollywood-establishment) protagonists into encounters with marginalised racial and social minorities. These moments bring the process of erasure into relief and make the anxious abjection of the white protagonists potentially even more uncomfortable for the viewer. The abject white identity seen in this dissertation reveals that dominant conceptions of representation and subjectivity seen in Hollywood cinema have

[20] Dussel, *Filosofia de la liberación* [*Philosophy of Liberation*, 1980], 64-65.
[21] Derrida, *De la grammatologie* [*Of Grammatology*, 1967].

become unstable and insufficient. Not only does this represent a call for new kinds of onscreen subjectivity but also, due to the coercion of the audience via cinematic individuation, new kinds of spectatorial subjectivities (see the conclusion for some hypothetical sketches of these).

But these are not simply films of hopeless negation. They are perhaps not revolutionary, but are a new kind of film that requires a new form of spectatorship. They demand an attuned audience so as to affect the sensorial engagement and disengagement of cinematic individuation within the mediated spaces they provide. This mediated space is the figurative distance in-between eye and screen where a film is experienced. The experience of watching a film is dependent on both viewer and film/viewing apparatus and does not wholly belong to either transmitter or receiver. Instead, the in-between space of mediation is also a milieu where the distinction between sender and receiver is indistinct: a network of interdependent relationships where subject and object definitions are slippery at best. Theoretically, this is a formal issue; but narrative and theme remain essential for guiding us into this purely stylistic encounter.

The endgame of these formal and narrative strategies is the transference of abjection from screen to viewer in the subjectivity blender that is the in-between space of mediation. Through this experience, the viewer comes to realise the abjection that lies at the heart of a bloated neo-liberal system (represented metonymically by Hollywood) and, as subjects within this system, within themselves. Again, these abject awakenings are not hopeless. They are necessary deindividuations of a subjectivity that is no longer productive, or never was. Within the space of mediation, the encounter with the film assists the viewer's coming-to-abjection, and by then dismantling them into a liminal state of being, returns the audience to a state of potential where they might reindividuate into something less entropic.

(Neo)Classical Style

David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Janet Staiger outline their conception of Hollywood as a classical style in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985). This now-canonical text proposes that by the 1920s, Hollywood had generated such an efficient schema of standardised production techniques, narrative templates, and defined genres as to make its output practically self-generating and self-regulating. This system is able to reconfigure itself in order to encompass new technologies, such as the implementation of sound in the late 1920s, and to adjust to changing audience tastes, such as the popularity of film noir in the wake of the Great Depression and World War II. Even though the classical model is a result of the Fordist mode of conveyor belt production, it is also a system of differences wherein varied films counterbalance each other to give the whole a placid, smooth appearance. Bordwell states: 'No Hollywood film *is* the classical system; each is an "unstable equilibrium" of classical norms'.[22] When pushed to delineate the coverage of the classical style, Bordwell suggests: 'Really problematic Hollywood films become limit-texts, works which, while remaining traditionally legible, dramatise some limits of that legibility. They do not, however, posit thoroughgoing alternatives. So powerful is the classical paradigm that it regulates what may violate it.'[23]

Bordwell and Thompson have continued this approach throughout their careers, expanding the theory to encompass modern Hollywood. More recent books such as Thompson's *Storytelling in the New Hollywood* (1999) and Bordwell's *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (2006) provide rigorous cataloguing of narrative tropes and trends in Hollywood

[22] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*, 5.
[23] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, 81. Sadly, Bordwell does not give us any examples of potential 'limit-works'. If one had to provide a pre-1960 Hollywood example, perhaps Todd Browning's *Freaks* (1932) fits the bill.

cinema, and extensive data collection on aspects such as average shot length. This archival approach has the unfortunate effect of reminding one of an entomologist carefully pinning dead butterflies into a display case. The petrifying nature of such research has tended to grate upon other, nominally oppositional, Hollywood theorists. Elsaesser comments:

> Advocates of a 'post-classical' break would add that it is special effects, new sound design, and the bodily sensations of the theme park and roller coaster ride which most clearly typify the aesthetics of New Hollywood, and that horror, violent death and explicit sex have migrated from the B-movie (and pornography) margin to the mainstream centre. Together, these sensory stimuli and thematic preoccupations have changed the way films are designed and visualized, with the result that they are differently interpreted (or used) by audiences. 'Spectacle' in this context would connote that such movies are 'experienced' rather than watched, that they offer a fantasy space to 'inhabit', rather than opening a window onto reality.[24]

There is an antithetical double movement at work here. The universe of the film is increasingly spilling beyond its onscreen boundaries to offer the spectator an entire world to immerse themselves in, often as active 'users'. However, the marketing and branding that accounts for the expansion of this universe—*Disney on Ice*, *The Hunger Games* (Gary Ross, 2012) inspired makeup—can have an unsavoury and alienating effect.

A variety of theorists, including Elsaesser, who would identify themselves as post-classicists, overlap with the field of reflexivity studies. Theorists such as John T. Caldwell, J. D. Connor, and Jerome Christensen work with an 'allegorical mode', reading Hollywood films as allegories for a variety of economic and industrial concerns, as well as allegories of their own production. Elsaesser argues that the allegorical mode is 'symptomatic of the felt need to account for the frequently acknowledged reflexivity of contemporary Hollywood films, while expressing dissatisfaction with the usual attribution of such reflexivity to an all-purpose, "anything goes" postmodernism'.[25] What Elsaesser refers to as 'anything goes postmodernism' suggests an extremely broad definition of the term which

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[24] Elsaesser and Buckland, *Contemporary American Film*, 29.
[25] Elsaesser, *The Persistence of Hollywood*, 337.

encompasses potentially all forms of reflexive experimentation. Such a boundaryless definition of postmodernism may chime with common usage of the term but lacks the structure and focus to be useful either theoretically or artistically (hence Caldwell, Connor, and Christensen's preference for the allegorical mode). This expanded version of postmodernism also covers the extent to which a film's marketing has overflowed its boundaries. A film is now not just a film, but a line of toys, a fast food promotion, a theme park ride, an internet series, and more. This generates in the spectators both a sense of immersion, and a sense of distancing, what Elsaesser sees as 'turning history into media memory and media memory into cult-classic nostalgia.'[26] Thus, the spectators' relationship with history and memory is mediated by cinema, imbuing us all with a collective sense of nostalgia that overrides our individual subjective experiences.

The antagonism between these two schools of thought is further strained by some barbs from each side. Bordwell appears to dismiss Elsaesser's concept of 'spectacle' cinema when he declares 'the fact that a film will be hyped on many platforms mandates nothing about its form and style', the suggestion being that the technical and marketing aspects of a film should be a separate area of study.[27] Bordwell is particularly unmoved by the free interpretation practised by those such as Christensen and Connor. He writes that 'the academic institution's current heuristics encourage highly novel, if strained, interpretations. To create fresh readings, critics are encouraged to forge slender chains of associations, including those that would make any work of fiction, drama, or cinema seem to anticipate its own interpretation.'[28] The particularly offensive party here may be Connor, who argues that every film is an allegory of its own production. Connor claims that 'neoclassical Hollywood films are often overwhelmed by their allegories. Their stories frequently make no sense at all

[26] Elsaesser, 335.
[27] Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, 6.
[28] Bordwell, 9.

except as backstories.'[29] Thus, such films expect this production-reflexive interpretation to the extent that they are content to hide their narrative within a semi-latent diegetic layer. This extremely rigid and absolutist approach is problematic given that it denies any other interpretation. I believe that Metz's idea of enunciation is somewhat more nuanced in that it admits that what is communicated is largely a matter of personal understanding. It is the gesture of communication, rather than the content of the message, which is more important.

Connor himself feels impelled to register his own opposition to the work of Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger:

> this [Connor's] definition of the classical constitutes a flat rejection of the account in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* that Hollywood classicism, its 'excessive obviousness'.… For the authors of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema,* the system is so overwhelming that the actual instances that the system produces can have no effect on its operation. There is no need to read the films of classical Hollywood for their self-understanding of that system because no such understanding is permissible. And any understanding one did find would simply be a deviation that enabled the system to maintain itself.[30]

Such a denial of the potential for interpretation, and indeed the right to subjective opinion, would be antagonising for a number of film theorists and academics. However, as I will later propose, the classical style is not quite as stubbornly unimaginative as Connor insists, and nor is the post-classical method quite as liberated as it may seem (as is freely admitted by its practitioners).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an area where the classical and the post-classical appear incompatible. Bordwell, viewing the recent critical interest in reflexivity, allusion, and metafictional forms, comments:

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[29] Connor, '"The Projections": Allegories of Industrial Crisis in Neoclassical Hollywood', 61.
[30] Connor, 60.

> Surely some recent films are self-conscious, but playful knowingness isn't new to Hollywood cinema. The Marx Brothers films, Bugs Bunny cartoons, *Hellzapoppin'* (1941), and the Bob Hope/Bing Crosby road pictures are shot through with references to other movies (and to themselves *as* movies). What seems new are the extensions of allusionism to noncomic genres and the tactic of addressing some allusions to only part of the audience. [Noël] Carroll calls the latter a two-tiered system of communication—a straight story for everybody and allusions for the movie buffs.[31]

This is one facet of Bordwell's argument that the so-called 'post-classical' cinema is essentially a continuation of the tropes and techniques of the classical style. He makes reference in the quotation above to a one-time co-editor Noël Carroll. Carroll, whilst ideologically aligned with Bordwell, has written on reflexivity as an aesthetic tool. He coins the term 'apperceptive reflexivity. That is, it is said to make the viewer aware of certain generic features of film perception, if not all perception.'[32] Whilst this raises some potential avenues of investigation in the field of phenomenology and spectatorship (although the term essentially means the same as 'self-reflexivity', albeit with a focus on the constitution of the self), Carroll insists that it applies to experimental, and not mainstream, cinema.[33] We might, however, heed the advice of David E. James: 'The categories of the avant-garde and the industry must be dismantled, and their blank polarization opened to the play of heterogeneity and interdetermination with the field of practices the terms otherwise simply divide.'[34]

As previously mentioned, production reflexivity readings abound amongst the post/neo-classical critics. Jerome Christensen views this as a deliberate and pointed attempt on behalf of film studios to further their own agendas. This may be the case for a variety of reasons: 'a studio may use allegory to admonish its employees and punish its stars; it may

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[31] Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, 8. Bordwell is incorrect to suggest that self-reflexivity was solely the remit of comedy in classic Hollywood. Film noirs are littered with in-jokes and allusion. Witness Glenn Ford's confused expression in *The Big Heat* (Fritz Lang, 1953) upon hearing 'Put the Blame on Mame', a song famously sung in *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946) by his co-star Rita Hayworth. Or, picture Robert Mitchum looking to his left, his right, then straight at the camera to deliver the line 'I'm in a frame' in *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947).
[32] Carroll, *Interpreting the Moving Image*, 306.
[33] A similar approach to Vivian Sobchack's, particularly evident in *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (1992).
[34] James, *Allegories of Cinema*, 22.

exhort the president of the United States to alter policy; it may allegorise its formidable institutional power to appease its creditors and dismay its competitors.'[35]

Whilst Christensen sees films as carrying message content that borders on propaganda, Connor proposes a more inward-looking allegorical form. He argues: 'the studio system strongly encouraged its workers to understand the films they made as corporate representations, and that it was as normal for films to allegorise the conditions and ideologies of the corporations that were, as they say, "the authors of these motion pictures for copyright purposes" as it was for them to allegorise the medium itself.'[36] So powerful is this urge to self-allegorise, and so important is the need for the galvanisation of studio production, that Connor makes the provocative statement that 'every film not only must be an allegory, it must insist on allegory, even at the expense of the literal narrative'.[37] One can see how Connor's discarding (or at least watering down) of the importance of narrative would irk a critic such as Bordwell who has spent so much time arguing for the enduring strength of the Hollywood narrative model.

Curiously, when confronted with films that place filmmaking and Hollywood professionals within their diegesis, Connor suddenly turns his nose up. Writing about *The Day of the Locust* (John Schlesinger, 1975) he finds only 'thuddingly obvious politics and thuddingly obvious ironies'.[38] Meanwhile, *The Last Tycoon* (Elia Kazan, 1976) 'turns modernist display back into classical restraint. The film's allegorical impulse may have been a widely shared nostalgia for an era of studio greatness (under Thalberg or Evans)'.[39] One suspects that Connor is too attached to the puzzle-solving nature of deciphering the hidden allegorical code in movies. When the riddle is too easy he loses interest, seeing only 'obvious

[35] Christensen, *America's Corporate Art*, 7.
[36] Connor, 'The Projections', 60.
[37] Connor, 60.
[38] Connor, *The Studios after the Studios*, 106.
[39] Connor, 11.

ironies' and 'nostalgia'. Of course, the idea that a film may be an allegory for something outside of the film industry has no place in Connor's schema, and thus these self-reflexive films are never likely to satisfy his project. Rather grumpily, Connor even proposes that the self-reflexive film is not a definable genre: 'we might extend the category of the movie movie to include, potentially, any movie at all. Who is to say *this* movie is not self-reflexive?'[40] This is a valid opinion, but a petty one. All genres can mutate, and migrate, but a study of one has to start with the 'thuddingly obvious' examples before moving on to subtler ones.[41]

Elsaesser deviates from Christensen and Connor's rigid critical paradigms. He views reflexivity in terms of positive and negative 'feedback': 'if the classical represents in some sense the dominance of negative feedback (or self-regulation and deniability) then the post-classical would signal the presence and appreciation of the positive feedback loops that the new technologies and social networks have added to the managerial to-do list of running a film company or studio in the post-classical period.'[42] Elsaesser equates negative feedback with the classical style's attempt to self-regulate and achieve stable equilibrium, whilst positive feedback seeks to embrace change. However, musing on this point leads Elsaesser to entirely dismiss the concept of classical Hollywood: 'I began to realise that Hollywood has always been for me a case of positive feedback, in the full ambiguity of the term: it has always been post-classical, even as I tried to define it as classical.'[43] It seems, that either Hollywood never stopped being classical, or that it never was.[44] We would be well served to consider Miriam Hansen's configuration of classical Hollywood as a form of modernism. Hanson is critical about the work of Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger, and sees reflexivity as

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[40] Connor, 43.
[41] For example, *Star Wars* is arguably a sci-fi, a Western, a war film, a disaster movie, a creature feature, a pirate movie, a neo-noir, a faith pic, a Samurai film, and more.
[42] Elsaesser, *The Persistence of Hollywood*, 338.
[43] Elsaesser, 338.
[44] This is reminiscent of the tedious question of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism that has occupied many an academic over the past half a century or so.

a vital component that creates a public sphere from the assemblage of classical style. She wrote:

> this dimension of reflexivity is key to the claim that the cinema not only represented a specifically modern type of public sphere, the public here understood as a 'social horizon of experience', but also that this new mass public could have functioned as a discursive form in which individual experience could be articulated and find recognition by both subjects and others, including strangers.[45]

This is closer in kind to my proposal for Hollywood as a system. The system, and reflexivity, does not simply exist as an insular form of defence and incubation, but must include some attempt to connect with the audience. Whilst Bordwell does account for the audience in his work, he does so on a cognitive level—classical style endures because it coordinates so effectively with the operation of the human brain. Hansen's description of classical cinema as 'vernacular modernism' allows the spectators to become active players in the sociopolitical themes negotiated in cinema.

Reflecting each Other

We are not obligated to pick a side in the classical and neo-classical debate. I propose instead that while it may seem that the two arguments are incompatible they share more goals than differences.

For all the seeming disparity between, say, Bordwell and Connor, they share more common ground than either might admit. John T. Caldwell ploughs a similar field to Connor, and indeed Connor openly admires Caldwell's work.[46] Yet Caldwell sees the production allegories in cinema (and television) as serving a self-regulatory purpose, what Elsaesser describes as the 'negative feedback' of classical cinema. Caldwell argues: 'Film and

[45] Hansen, 'The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism', 70.
[46] Connor, *The Studios after the Studios*, 522.

television, in other words, do not simply produce mass popular culture, but rather film/TV production communities themselves are cultural expressions and entities involving all of the symbolic processes and collective practices that other cultures use to gain and reinforce identity, to forge consensus and order, to perpetuate themselves and their interests, and to interpret the media as audience members.'[47] Seen this way, reflexivity in classical style is used as a security device.

Elsaesser too acknowledges that reflexivity can be deployed as a means of control:

> That the site of such struggles can be the film itself is what is fascinating about studying Hollywood's modes of address, because the means of address and control … could well be reflexivity itself, in the form of complicity and knowingness, by which the film implicates the viewer at the story level and a metalevel. The latter enfolds the audience in cognitive double-binds, counters blasé indifference with immersive sensory overload, or acknowledges fan power through narrative complexity, while also answering (by performing within the film) the conspiratorial-paranoid reading of Hollywood that professional academics and critics are fond of.[48]

Not only is Elsaesser pulling the rug from under his 'conspiratorial-paranoid' colleagues Christensen and Connor, but his conception of a Hollywood that uses reflexivity to regulate and placate audience tastes can be aligned with Carroll's 'two-tiered' system of narrative and (barely veiled) sub-text.

Elsaesser finds further connections between the allegorical mode and the Bordwell, Thompson, Staiger view of self-regulating Hollywood:

> Connor and Christensen still adhere to what one might call 'allegories of representation' … as if to suggest that contemporary Hollywood fights its own 'identity politics,' when protecting its intellectual property and extending its reach, in the face of competition from other forms of entertainment, but perhaps just as much, in the face of competition from the weight of its own history.[49]

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[47] Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 2.
[48] Elsaesser, *The Persistence of Hollywood*, 330.
[49] Elsaesser, 337.

Whilst the advocates of the classical style analyse narrative and technical consistency, and the neo-classicists are apt to analyse self-reference and corporate branding, both sides are ultimately exploring how Hollywood protects, corrals, and polices its creative output. The approaches are different, but different enough to co-exist.

Ultimately Elsaesser's definition of the difference between classical and post-classical comes down to a small semantic difference (one which Bordwell has also noted):

> if 'classic/al' is a retronym from the start, then the very sign of the post-classical would be that it aspires to the 'classical' as its dominant effect: each term would name the other. And be dependent on the other, which might explain why historians like David Bordwell see a continuation of the 'classical Hollywood cinema' without a notable break, whereas others (myself included) have argued not only for the existence of a 'post-classical' Hollywood, but for the epistemic necessity of placing oneself outside the classical, in order to understand the classical. Both positions would be 'correct' and 'untenable' at the same time.[50]

As I noted earlier, Elsaesser concludes that Hollywood has always been post-classical, even in what is widely referred to as the classical period.[51] This does not appear any different from Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger's insistence that Hollywood is still classical, despite the many changes over the past fifty-five years. Elsaesser says Hollywood has always been post-classical due to 'positive feedback': Hollywood's ability to acknowledge and embrace changing tastes and new technologies. Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger say that Hollywood has always been classical, as classical style was inherently designed to recalibrate in order to account for changing tastes and new technologies. Within this impasse the only way to separate classical and post-classical is using Elsaesser's semantic: the term classical by definition can only be retroactively applied; you cannot label the present moment as classical.

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[50] Elsaesser, 331 – 332.

[51] The exact dates may differ, but this period refers to either the consolidation of studio power in 1917, or the beginning of the sound era (1927), to 1960. This end date relates to several aspects: the disintegration of the Motion Picture Production code, the burgeoning TV industry, the interest in new European cinematic movements which mirrored a growing counter-culture in the USA. For more on changes in US cinema in the 1960s see Paul Monaco's *The Sixties: 1960 – 1969* (2003) (Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001).

However, if we see classical as perpetually evading the present, and if we accept classical style to be something that is always evolving, then we might say that the classical is a state of immanence, and classical style is a state of constant becoming.

When reading Elsaesser's recent work one senses that he feels uncomfortable with the idea of diametrically opposed notions of classical and post-classical. Indeed, whilst the approaches may differ, the destination is often the same. Rather than picking at the differences, we would be better served by looking at the consistencies between Hollywood scholars. It has become clear that Hollywood implements a variety of aesthetic, technical, and marketing techniques that the studios have exploited in order to safeguard their survival and expansion. It is also clear that certain movements and filmmakers have been able to influence and co-opt this loose system. In both the classical and post-classical schools there lies a suggestion that reflexivity has been used as a means to reinforce studio trademarks and history. I propose that reflexivity also offers us, as critics and viewers, an opening into this mechanism, and suggest that it might be breaking down. The films that diagnose themselves, and their viewers, as abject, are an invitation to partake in a systemic crash—or a performance thereof.

If one views Hollywood as being structured according to classical foundations, then the inference is that the subject-object-dyad holds true. This was an ideologically dominant position in film studies until the coming to prominence of poststructural theory in the 1970s (and the torch is carried by the Bordwell gang). At this time, scholars cast this idea of subjectivity into crisis: be it Laura Mulvey's gendered spectator and apparatus, Christian Metz's positioning of the screen as imaginary signifier for a spectator indulging a reality-impression, or Jean-Louis Baudry's investigations into the ideological effects imbued

in the act of projection and spectatorship.[52] Whilst these writers (and more) continually question the role of the spectator, the core principle remains that there is a subject and that there is an object—albeit with blurred definitions.

Emerging from the confluence of film studies and poststructuralism were Gilles Deleuze's *Cinéma 1. L'image-Mouvement* [*Cinema I*: *The Movement-Image*, 1983], and *Cinéma II: L'image-temps* [*Cinema II: The Time-Image*, 1985]. Movement-image films are characteristically loyal to the subject-object-dyad. Causality is easily legible, and temporality is broadly linear. Importantly, movement-image protagonists have subjective agency. Their actions lead to resolution or change. Time-image cinema emerges from the trauma of the Second World War. These films do not adhere to clear causality or temporal progression, and their protagonists are stripped of agency. The effect on the subject-object-dyad, according to Deleuze, is 'to lose its importance…. We run in fact into a principle of indeterminability, of indiscernibility: we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental, in the situation, not because they are confused but because we do not have to know and there is no longer even a place from which to ask.'[53] The characters in time-image cinema can be considered abject due to the removal of their capacity to act as subjects. Likewise, the viewers of these films lose their sense of subject and object boundaries by being cast into 'a place' where such definitions themselves do not exist. Thus, the viewer is also in a position of abjection.

But what did this mean for Hollywood? Deleuze's own aversion to the United States industry after the New Hollywood period (his books favour international auteur heavyweights

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[52] See, for example, Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, issue 3 (October 1975): 6 – 18; Christian Metz, *Le Signifiant imaginare* [*The Imaginary Signifier*, 1975], trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Ind.: University of Indiana Press, 1982); Jean-Louis Baudry, 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus' (1970), trans. Alan Williams (1974; revised 1983), in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader,* ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 286 – 306.
[53] Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, 7.

such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Yasujirō Ozu, and Jean-Luc Godard; classical Hollywood filmmakers like Buster Keaton, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, and Alfred Hitchcock; and occasional New Hollywood directors including Stanley Kubrick, John Cassavetes, and Robert Altman) has perhaps accounted for a certain reluctance to unite the two—Deleuze wrote that post-war American cinema either 'finds it limits' or 'becomes empty and starts to grate'.[54] Irrespective of this, many scholars have provided Deleuzian readings of Hollywood films.[55] The problem lies within the application of Deleuze. Ultimately, Deleuze is providing a descriptive analysis of cinema's reaction to global change and catastrophe. Crucially, this analysis is not prescriptive. To then write books and articles demonstrating how certain films are 'Deleuzian' and so to 'prove' the theory, whilst being useful endeavours, does not fulfil the implications of the two *Cinema* volumes. To return to Metz's identification theory wherein the screen becomes a Lacanian mirror of self-realisation, if their sociological milieu causes a person to experience abjection then that abjection will be mirrored back to them by onscreen figures. In such instances it is the conditions of the spectator, rather than the film, which create the effects which Deleuze defines. What needs to be acknowledged and explored is the idea that Deleuze did not simply discover a crisis of subjectivity but the absence of subjectivity. The concept of cinematic individuation provides a prism through which this absence can be considered and resolved. It is a method to describe the dissolution of the

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[54] Deleuze, *Cinéma 1. L'Image-Mouvement* [*Cinema I*: *The Movement Image*], 234.
[55] Cf. David Martin Jones' application of Deleuze to *50 First Dates* (Peter Segal, 2004) in 'Demystifying Deleuze', *Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood movies*, ed. Warren Buckland (Abingdon, Oxon. And New York: Routledge, 2009), 214 – 233; Patricia Pisters' positing of the 'Club Silencio' scene in David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001; see Chapter 3) as emblematising Deleuze's time-image in 'Delirium Cinema or Machines of the Invisible?', *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema*, eds. Ian Buchanan and Patricia MacCormack (London: Continuum, 2008), 102 – 115; Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland's Deleuzian analysis of *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1990) in *Studying Contemporary American Film*; or Anna Powell's combination of Deleuze and *Hellboy* (Guillermo del Toro, 2003) in 'The Daemons of Unplumbed Space: Mixing the Planes in *Hellboy*', *Deleuze and Film*, eds. David Martin-Jones and William Brown (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 173 – 191.

subject-object-dyad that is catalysed in the encounter of cinematic abjection by an abject spectator.

Cinematic Individuation

As shown, Hollywood has been conceived as a classical system that shifts and evolves with the cultural zeitgeist in order to prolong its existence indefinitely and, when viewed as a whole, appears imposing and impregnable; but, when viewed from inside, it does not really exist. The post-classical, postmodern and ever-expanding version of Hollywood described by Elsaesser and Christensen aggressively furthers its market potential as it spills beyond the cinema. Hence, we can buy *Star Wars* themed burgers in McDonald's, make phone calls from *Ghostbusters* (Paul Feig, 2016) themed payphones ('who you gonna call?' being the hook), and any commute through King's Cross Station now involves circumnavigating a crowd of Harry Potter fans queuing up for photos of 'Platform 9 ¾'.[56]

I argue that, rather than being a perpetual motion machine to which we are denied access, Hollywood cinema is a technical assemblage—a network of technical objects (films) that connects with organic (human) beings—with which we can forge a relation through social individuation. By individuation I mean what Gilbert Simondon described as the process through which the subjectivity of an individual is formed from a unique combination of potentials. This process is not a one-time-only event. My coming-to-consciousness as a young child was an obvious instance of individuation, but it is an ongoing process throughout my existence. In fact, at every instance of my life I am coming-into-being anew. Thus, each moment is only achieved and experienced because of my individuation; each encounter with another being or object is achieved and is experienced through a mutual social individuation.

[56] The issue of anyone actually using a public payphone and said phone even being operational is another matter entirely. Platform 9 ¾ consists of a sawn-off luggage trolley stuck to a wall next to a Waitrose.

Such metastable (constantly changing) conditions fall broadly under what Adrian Mackenzie divines from Simondon to mean 'transduction': 'any process (physical, biological, social, psychic or technical) in which metastablity emerges.'[57] It is through these social individuations that I am exposed to, and come away with, new potentials (as I have shared in the unique configuration of potentials that configure the other person or object—and vice versa). Whilst contemporary media threaten to cut us adrift in a 'post-truth' society unanchored from purpose, these social individuations will produce the conditions to reconnect us with our world, in the form of what Simondon describes as 'technical individuation'.[58]

Simondon tells us that technical individuation is a process whereby an individual, or a socially individuated assemblage, enters into social individuation with a technical object. An obvious example of this would be the various social networks that connect millions of users through a technical interface. According to Simondon, 'the technical object is distinguishable from the natural being in the sense that it is not part of the world. It intervenes as mediator between man and the world'.[59] Thus the social network interface, whilst having no corporeal presence in our world, takes on the role of the mediator which connects us to its particular milieu. As Simondon writes, this is a separate milieu from our own preindividual state:

> The individualisation of technical beings is the condition of technical progress. This individualisation is made possible by the recurrent causality in an environment that the technical being creates around itself. The environment conditions the technical beings, which in turn conditions it. One may call this environment, which is both technical and natural, an associated milieu.[60]

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[57] Mackenzie, *Transductions*, 16 – 17.
[58] I am pointing the finger at the social media algorithms that show the user news stories that are either partisan or false, TV channels that have become increasingly hysterical (FOX News) in order to compete with the dominance of social media, major news corporations lurching towards increasingly populist and right wing editorial stances, Hollywood's conveyor belt of wealthy libertarian protagonists (Batman and Iron Man), and all of Hollywood's narratives about disenfranchised rural communities rallying against corrupt metropolitan elites (*The Hunger Games*, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* ((J. J. Abrams, 2015)). It is hardly surprising that the USA and the UK inflicted Trump and Brexit on themselves.
[59] Simondon, 'On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects', 417.
[60] Simondon, 'Technical Individuation', 207.

By proposing another associated milieu for technical being, we can see how Simondon is mapping out an ever-expanding web of potential preindividual combinations. For now, we not only have the myriad possibilities of mutations within the assemblages of organic beings, but also the potential to unite with the specific field of potential energy wherein technical beings are produced. It is not merely a question of humans forming collectives. With technical individuation we can become part of 'networks': 'We must go beyond the cultural task of "raising philosophical and notional awareness of technical reality" through an existential ordeal in which all human beings ought to take part, that of "taking on a particular position in the technical network", whereby each would have the experience, as a participant, of a series of processes in which humans and machines are inextricable.'[61] The question is not really whether or not we are willing to become part of a network as, like it or not, we already are. What is vital for Simondon's philosophy to have an effect is an awareness of our position.

Simondon uses the evocative metaphor of the impurity in a supercooled solution of water to demonstrate how the assemblage can affect and be affected. The metastable supercooled water can be easily transformed by a single change in its structure. Like Kurt Vonnegut's 'Ice-9' which causes the world's oceans to freeze over, one impurity would start a chain reaction that would lead the entire solution to crystallise.[62] Thomas LaMarre elaborates: 'the seed or germ that makes the crystalline structure materialise out of the supersaturated solution is, in a sense, just a tiny little impurity.'[63] This is what occurs with the preindividual shares within social individuation. Practically unobservable thoughts and actions can have a ripple effect to the extent that the entire whole can be radically altered.[64] Mackenzie implicitly evokes Spinoza to describe this metaphor in more localised terms: 'If a

[61] Combes, *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual*, 70.
[62] See Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle* [1963] (London: Penguin, 2008).
[63] LaMarre, 'Afterword: Humans and Machines', 85.
[64] To follow the metaphor to the letter invokes a potentially troubling image of homogeneity.

stone speeds up, if its flight time is reduced, what a body can do has changed; its limits have altered.'[65] This chain reaction does not merely occur during wholesale change (the supercooled solution), but is in fact the basis of ontogenesis itself.

What the crystalline metaphor demonstrates is that the conditions within any particular milieu are open to drastic alteration. And the altered beings that connect within these networks then migrate into other systems. For Simondon, individuated beings are never stuck in their milieu (social environment), and they are not fixed within their assemblage. They can exist in several milieux (as is facilitated by the technical objects) and can phase and dephase out of social individuations. It is even theoretically possible to return to the preindividual stage whence individuation arises, although I suspect this would involve some severe trauma akin to what Jacques Lacan calls the unexperiencable and unrepresentable Real: a collapse of the symbolic order and the annihilation of subjectivity. It is in this sense that Simondon calls all individuals 'transindividuals'. Muriel Combes suggests that 'with the notion of the *transindividual*, Simondon is above all proposing a new manner of conceiving what is very inadequately called the relation between individual and society. With that in mind, he is first of all intent on showing that in fact no immediate relation exists between them.'[66] I take Combes' insistence that no immediate relation exists between the individual and society to mean two things. Firstly, as the term 'transindividual' infers that there is never any stable state of being, said relationship between individuals and society can never be fixed. Secondly, Simondon insists on the technical object as the means with which to connect us to the world. When the technical object is lacking, our relationship with the world is thus severed (a theoretical position as the technical object is never missing).

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[65] Mackenzie, *Transductions*, 85. I refer to a Spinozan lemma which states that '*A body which moves* or *is at rest must be determined to motion or rest by another body, which has also been determined to motion or rest by another, and that again by another, and so on, to infinity*.' In *Ethics*, 41.
[66] Combes, *Philosophy of the Transindividual*, 42.

An example of the lasting 'trace' of our individuations with other beings and with technical objects is provided in László Krasznahorkai's short story 'The Preservation of a Buddha' (2008). This short extract describes those working to restore a centuries old statue of the Amida Buddha at the Bijutsu-in [National Treasure Institute for the Restoration of Wooden Statues] in Inazawa, Japan:

> if at such time some of them head out together after a typical day, no one is thinking that at the same time they are carrying, as they get into the bus and go home, according to the original consensus, the soul of the Amida Buddha in their own souls, which they then take home, give it something to eat for dinner, sit down with it in front of the TV, then lie down to rest with it and finally the next day bring it back to the Bijutsu-in, continuing their meticulous work on the section that has been entrusted to them[67]

In Kraznahorkai's story, the technical object [the statue] facilitates a cooperative endeavour [the restoration] where each craftsperson works on an individual section to create a constituent whole. In the same way, when we have a conversation a technical object [language] allows us to bring our individual 'sections' [opinions for example] into a synthesis [dialogue]. We can then both take the 'offspring' of our discussion home for dinner.

Several previous films scholars have attempted to conceive of a unique relationship between cinema and viewers using the film theory of Gilles Deleuze, and his work with Félix Guattari.[68] A philosophical examination of resistance movements and trends that is based solely on Deleuze risks propagating pre-existing criticisms of his work.[69] Deleuze's theories of alterity call for destabilisation of hegemonic power structures (such as Hollywood) by means of a self-othering, a deliberate occupation of space of the traditionally marginalised

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[67] Krasznahorkai, *Seiobo járt odalent* [*Seibo There Below*, 2008], 65.
[68] See, for example, Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film*; del Rio, *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection*; David Martin-Jones, 'Demystifying Deleuze'; Frida Beckman, 'Hearing Voices: Schizoanalysis and the Voice as Image in the Cinema of David Lynch'.
[69] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's rebuke of Deleuze and Michel Foucault's appropriation of minority discourses, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'.

termed 'becoming-minor'.[70] Whilst his language is deliberately provocative and his endgame *humanistic* (despite his anti-human metaphors) and positive, Deleuze's status as a white, Western-European, academic, means that he cannot help but steamroller the very real struggle for agency by those occupying the margins out of no choice of their own. Deleuze always insisted, along with his friends Guattari and Michel Foucault, that hegemonic discourses in society propagated dominant (often colonial) ideology and power. But, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak accuses, by laying the burden and ability to shift the structure of these discourses solely in the lap of philosophers such as himself, Deleuze cast his cohorts as the guardians of power structures.[71] He may have had progressive intentions, but he condemned himself to a problematic 'white saviour' role that excluded 'minority' voices all over again.[72] For all of his criticisms of Israel's occupation of Palestine, it would be the Israeli Defence Force [IDF] who would use post-structuralist ideas taken from *A Thousand Plateaus* to theorise their military strategy in the West Bank. Ultimately, the practical application of Deleuze benefited the occupying force rather than the subjugated people.[73]

Simondon's combination of metaphysics with empirical scientific data bypasses the tricky questions of biological determination as he sees power as defined by machines and technology. There is no need to discard Deleuze, only to frame him differently. Simondon was a key influence on Deleuze: a debt that he would later repay by pushing for the publication of Simondon's then unpublished thesis. By moving in reverse from Deleuze to Simondon, I can discard some of the unwanted baggage, and approach the question of

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[70] See Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Pour une Littérature Mineure* [*Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 1975], *L'anti-Œdipe* [*Anti-Oedipus*, 1972], and *Mille Plateaux* [*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980]; and Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement Image* and *Cinema II: The Time-Image*.

[71] Aijaz Ahmed's critique of Frederic Jameson also echoes these ideas: 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory"' [1986], in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 84-88.

[72] Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', 272.

[73] See Eyal Weizman, 'Urban Warfare: Walking Through Walls', in *Hollow Land* (London: Verso, 2007), 185 – 218. This is not to say that the IDF's actions in Palestine would be markedly different if they had not used *Mille Plateaux*. Weizman writes of the exposure to Deleuze and Guattari, Spinoza, Sartre, Derrida, and more, for Israeli military leaders who had received tertiary education in the US in the 1960s.

individuation in a nascent state. This philosophical duet will be used to resolve an aporia at stake: how can one connect on an individual basis, and furthermore how can we as a society connect on a communal basis, with a system (Hollywood) that, beyond the financial transaction at the ticket kiosk, appears not to require any exterior intervention for its existence and development.

State of Exception

Hollywood can be considered as what Giorgio Agamben termed a 'state of exception', 'a space devoid of law, a zone of anomie in which all legal determinations—and above all the very distinction between public and private—are deactivated.'[74] The state of exception is generally used in geopolitical terms (Hong Kong as a 'Special Administrative Region' of China, and Taiwan's extraterritorial status under the 'One China Policy' sees these regions as a part of, yet separate, from mainland China), or legal and humanitarian terms (a prisoner of war loses certain defining characteristics of humanity and civilised life: right to self-expression, political distinctions, and freedom of movement). Within these zones of exception, the absence of power structures and societal 'norms' leads traditional categories and divisions such as right wing and left wing, economics, gender, and race to become indistinct and broken down.

Agamben's most fully fleshed concept of the zone of exception is included with his discussion of *homo sacer* (sacred man). This is a social condition decreed by Roman law wherein a person is banned from society. The value of their life is thus negated so that they may be killed without consequence. The exception to this rule is that they may not be used as a religious sacrifice (for such a life is already sacred). Agamben compares this to the idea of

[74] Agamben, *Stato di eccezione* [*State of Exception*, 2003], 50.

'bare life', a condition lacking all but the necessary vitality of existence.[75] This condition reaches its zenith in Agamben's example of the Nazi concentration camp inmate.[76] The inmate is biologically alive, yet is so stripped of agency and status that their humanity appears questionable.[77] The liberation of the camps, the trials of those responsible, and the coming to terms of the crimes committed, cause crisis. For an individual, to consider the concentration camp is to consider one's own potential for bare life, and one's own potential for the abuse of sovereign power. When an entire society is forced to consider the concentration camps (as was the case post 1945), a milieu of uncertainty forms. This, Agamben declares, is the political appropriation and mobilisation of the margin: 'the realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of the political order – gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* [civil life] and *zoē* [bare life], right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction. At once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constitutes, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested.'[78]

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[75] This state also refers to sovereign rulers who wield power from a place outside of the rule of law.

[76] A contemporary counterpart to this can be found in the migrant camps and processing centres resulting from the current refugee crisis. Bare life can be seen in both government run holding facilities such as the Nauru Regional Processing Centre which houses migrants attempting to enter Australia, and also shanty towns set up by refugees themselves such as the now demolished 'jungle' in Calais. Some recent documentaries have focused on the dehumanising effect of the extraterritorial displacement of these peoples. Notable examples include Gianfranco Rosi's Golden Bear winning *Fire at Sea* (2016) which focuses on migrants attempting the dangerous crossing from Tunisia to Lampedusa, Eva Orner's *Chasing Asylum* (2016) which reveals the appalling conditions in Australia's offshore immigration detention centres, and Ai Wei Wei's revelation of the global networks of forced migration in *Human Flow* (2017). The migrant experience and camps have begun to appear in fictional films too. Jacques Audiard's Palme d'Or winning *Dheepan* (2015) showed Tamil refugees attempting to re-settle in Paris, whilst a holding camp on the island of Pantelleria was a striking background detail in Luca Guadagnino's *A Bigger Splash* (2015), residents of the Calais 'Jungle' appeared sporadically in Michael Haneke's *Happy End* (2017), Wolfgang Fischer presents a 'what would you do?' type of ethical question in *Styx* (2018), and supporting characters in Nadine Labeki's *Capernaum* (2018) included Syrian refugees and Ethopian illegal migrant workers living in Beirut.

[77] This accounts for the trials of Nazi doctors who used camp inmates as test subjects for experiments, many of which resulted in horrific maiming or death. Despite this, some of the doctors were unable to feel remorse, or were even confused by the accusations of torture and murder. In their eyes the test subjects had been decreed as inhuman and exempt from any ethical code. Why, they thought, should we be held to account for what we perceived as no different to animal testing (discounting how problematic that in itself may be).

[78] Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Il potere sovrano e la vita nuda* [*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 1995], 9.

This 'hidden foundation' infers the state of exception, bare life, to be an inverse image of the legally and ethically coded 'civilised' life. It is that which civilised life needs to define itself, just as potential to act is defined by potential not to act. Of course, this works in reverse as well. The state of exception can only define itself against civilised life. Agamben suggests that 'just as belonging to a class can be shown only by an example—that is, outside of the class itself—so non-belonging can be shown only at the centre of the class, by an exception. In every case … exception and example are correlative concepts that are ultimately indistinguishable and that come into play every time the very sense of the belonging and commonality of individuals is to be defined.'[79] Thus, were I to suggest Hollywood cinema as a public sphere common to a majority of people, I would instantly draw a zone of indistinction. An underbelly to my demarcation of a shared commonality. Those that fall into my new zone of indistinction enter a state of figurative bare life as I have taken away their voices. As they can neither express themselves, nor are the mainstream aware of their presence (and if they are they do not acknowledge them), whatever political position they hold becomes inconsequential and their only purpose is to allow the mainstream to exist by forming a border. Agamben states that 'once their fundamental referent becomes bare life, traditional political distinctions (such as those between Right and Left, liberalism and totalitarianism, private and public) lose their clarity and intelligibility and enter into a zone of indistinction.'[80] Considering the emergence in recent years of Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement (M5S) political party, one might describe contemporary Italian politics as being in a zone of indistinction. M5S describe themselves as syncretic, in that they exist outside the traditional right-left political spectrum. They run on a platform comprised of progressive policies on environmental issues, social justice, and civil liberties. They are also Eurosceptic and have allied with the right-wing United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). M5S have

[79] Agamben, 22.
[80] Agamben, 122.

gained significant ground in Italy but their position outside of the usual boundaries of political structures make it difficult for the media and the voters to discern and describe what they stand for and who they represent.

This is an abject condition insomuch that the notion of subjectivity is broken down and those in the zone of exclusion are thus placed into a liminal condition.[81] However, as the very status of abjection relies on some sense of demarcation between subject and object—without the boundary we cannot discern the contrast between the two states—and as there is no such division within the zone of exclusion, the traditional concept of abjection seems inadequate. New terminology might be necessary, but for now I refer to this status as abject expressionism. Whilst the zone of exclusion is abject when considered alongside *that which it is excluded from*, within the zone, the breakdown of subject and object boundaries is also immanent. Thus, I see abject expressionism as a progressive condition as a state of immanence contains the potential for reindividuation.

What Cinematic Individuation Can Be

This dissertation shows how an examination of self-reflexive Hollywood cinema can open up a discursive space wherein the vast and infinitely varied social assemblages of society can connect with the network assemblage of Hollywood. From this position I propose that several ethical and political forces are unleashed, that concern identity, commonality, and protest.

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[81] The similar applications of abjection and zones of exception within film studies is indicative of this relationship. For example. Jenny Chamarette uses Agamben to discuss New French Extremism in 'Shadows of Being in *Sombre*: Archetypes, Wolf-Men and Bare Life', in *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*, edited by Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall, 69 – 81 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011); Meghan Sutherland posits the typically abject zombie as residing in a zone of indistinction in 'Rigor/Mortis: The Industrial Life of Style in American Zombie Cinema', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, vol. 48, no. 1 (2007): 64 – 78; and Helene Strauss looks at bare life in terms of representations of migrants in South African cinema in 'Cinema of social recuperation: Xenophobic violence and migrant subjectivity in contemporary South Africa', *Subjectivity*, vol. 4, issue 2 (July 2011): 103 – 120.

These conditions that can be seen in contemporary social movements such as Black Lives Matter and Occupy. The relationship that is forged between the film and the viewer within this network is what I term cinematic individuation.

Cinematic individuation is a socio-technical individuation between a film, as technical object, and its viewer, as organic being. The technical film-object contains within it a multitude of further individuations on a diegetic level (characters), and on a practical level (the filmmakers); likewise, the organic being-viewer is themselves the product of a multiplicity of social individuations. The key condition of cinematic individuation is a dual movement of attraction and rejection, in that it provokes an affective, emotional, and phenomenological response, as well as a simultaneous cerebral, distancing effect. What cinematic individuation allows is an embodied experience of being connected beyond oneself combined with a cognitive understanding of the structures of the world. These positions open an abject expressionist zone of exception facilitated by the technical object that is the film. That is, the encounter between viewer and film (organic being and technical object) creates an aesthetic space in which identity is *extended*.

Cinematic individuation is predominantly used in this thesis in conjunction with self-reflexive film. There are two reasons for this marriage. Firstly, self-reflexive cinema has an innate capacity to prompt the viewer to consider the filmmaking process and its status as a film. Secondly, the diagnostic aspect of self-reflexive cinema leads, in recent years at least, to the kind of self-abjection that I argue is prevalent in contemporary Western society. This is not to say that cinematic individuation only applies to these seven case studies, or simply to self-reflexive film or contemporary cinema. Whilst cinematic individuation provides a conceptual tool for studying self-reflexivity, and self-reflexivity in turn illustrates this concept, it can feasibly apply to any film whatsoever. In his own study of reflexive devices in cinema, Christian Metz qualifies his findings on reflexivity with an instruction that ‘we

should not forget that enunciation is coexstensive with film and that it plays a part in the composition of every shot, so while it is not always marked, it is active everywhere.'[82] My examples, like Metz's, tend to align with moments that are visibly 'marked'.

The basic fulcrum of cinematic individuation is physical or emotional attraction combined with cognitive distancing—thus allowing one so effected to consider their experience in the moment. The emotional movement might be provoked by a range of cinematic devices and can be pleasurable (musical or visual frisson), traumatic (discomforting audio and visual stimuli), hypnotic (soundtrack and/or editing rhythms, extreme shot lengths), melancholic or nostalgic (narrative devices combined with some of the previously mentioned aesthetic devices. The cognisant movement can be provoked by the film (as in the case of metafiction) or can be brought about by the viewer themselves. You 'catch' [Metz would say you are 'jolted'] yourself in the experience. Consider the condition of sleep paralysis whereby the mind jolts upon the moment of sleep, leaving a body conscious yet immobile. The 'catch' is a kind of viewing-paralysis or cinematic mindfulness. It can happen without prompting, but one can also train oneself to recognise it and ease into it.

I write of experiences of self-abjection within my filmography which, via cinematic individuation, can be transmitted from screen to viewer and form abject spectators. As I have mentioned in regards to Metz's identification theory, abject characters may appear abject because the viewer is already abject themselves (identification). In certain films, such as the Hollywood-set works by Lynch analysed here, aesthetic devices might have such a strong effect as to momentarily erode the viewer's sense of distinction between themselves and the screen. This dissolution of boundaries is also an abject experience.

[82] Metz, *Impersonal Enunciation*, 23.

Cinematic Individuation in the USA

For Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger, Hollywood is a self-generating, self-regulating, and self-reconstituting system of differences that, by evenly distributing its differences, holds itself in check. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri deploy similar language to describe globalisation in the form of saturating 'Empire': 'The machine is self-validating, autopoietic—that is, systemic. It constructs social fabrics that evacuate or render ineffective any contradiction; it creates situations in which, before coercively neutralizing difference, seem to absorb it in an insignificant play of self-generating and self-regulating equilibria.'[83] I propose that the outputs of Hollywood is precisely such self-generating 'social fabrics' that, despite being constructed on differences, ultimately neutralise these differences by pitting them against each other to create a smooth averaged appearance.

Although the system does adapt itself to suit changing tastes and technologies, as its evolutions are aimed at retaining its position of dominance, it cannot be said to be an act of counteractualisation. The classical Hollywood style can also be seen as an associated milieu of American cinema, albeit a milieu of particular endurance. Simondon's philosophy of ontogenesis shows several ways in which milieux can be changed, or new milieux created. As the locus of Hollywood as the centre of film production becomes steadily more displaced due to new shifts such as global outsourcing of production and online release and marketing tools, the more unstable its core foundation becomes. Yet it is one thing to propose cinematic individuation as a tool for counteractualisation, it is another to see it in operation, and yet another to experience a successful example.

In my discussion of *Wes Craven's New Nightmare*, in Chapter 1, I show how individuation might be represented by the oneiric villain Freddy Krueger who transgresses

[83] Hardt and Negri. *Empire*, 34.

the barrier between virtual dreamscape and actualised being. Freddy neatly encapsulates the transindividual in that he moves from preindividual dreamscape into a 'new reality' through social individuation with his unfortunate victims. He is constantly moving between these states and reindividuating, using different shares of the preindividual to reconstitute himself and attempt a new angle of attack. Yet, whilst Freddy provides an illustrative visual example of individuation, the film fails as cinematic individuation as ultimately its extreme ironic detachment means that the spectator can only engage with it cerebrally, and not on an emotional level. Hence, it only fulfils half of the necessary fundamental conditions.

The concept of cinematic individuation necessarily involves a relationship between the film and the spectator and requires a catalyst or agent that instils or activates an aberrant thought in the minds of the audience. Why I propose examining self-reflexive film (either explicitly metafictional films, or those that situate their narratives within Hollywood and populate their plots with actors, directors, writers, producers, etc.) as containing the conditions needed for cinematic individuation is because it operates a bi-directional movement of disruption and connection. The Brechtian alienation [*Verfremdungseffekt*] of self-reflexive film is fairly apparent, given that it necessarily 'outs' itself as a cinematic construction.[84] Such a position, at least for theatre practitioners such as Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud, is inherently political as it disengages the emotional response and engages the intellect—although it would be remiss to suggest that Brecht productions are drained of emotion. However, self-reflexive cinema also, as paradoxical as it seems, is capable of forging emotive connections with the viewer. By foregrounding its own fiction, it is inherently honest about its dishonesty.

[84] In literary terms, one might also frame this through Viktor Shklovsky's *ostranenie*, or defamiliarisation. See Shklovsky, 'Iskusstvo, kak priem' ['Art, as Device,' 1917], in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1998), 15 – 21.

Linda Hutcheon uses the term 'narcissistic narrative' to refer to literary metafiction. This does not mean, as some may assume, a literature of self-obsession. Rather she harks back to Narcissus from Ovid's *Metamorphōseōn librī* [*The Metamorphoses*, 8 AD], the beautiful youth who falls in paralytic love with his own reflection; it is the literature of the mirror stage, of self-realisation. Narcissistic narratives are, at their core, narratives of the creation of being, and the creation of worlds for being to inhabit. Hutcheon describes the particular attraction of metafiction in similar terms to cinematic individuation:

> Its central paradox for the reader is that, while being made aware of the linguistic and fictive nature of what is being read, and thereby distanced from and unself-conscious identification on the level of character or plot, readers of metafiction are at the same time made mindful of their active role in reading, in participating in making the text mean. They are the distanced, yet involved, co-producers of the novel.[85]

Hutcheon identifies a reasonably analogous paradoxical reciprocity wherein readers are 'distanced, yet involved'. As I put it: 'disruption and connection'. This locates the engaged reader, or viewer, from Roland Barthes' 'writerly text', the result of which 'is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text.'[86]

The films that form the case studies of this dissertation can be divided roughly into two groups. There are those that are classically metafictional and correspond to Hutcheon's definitions of the style: '"Metafiction," as it has now been named, is fiction about fiction—that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity.'[87] This applies to *New Nightmare*, *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002), and *Inland Empire* (David Lynch, 2006). Others are less explicitly metafictional in that their narratives do not directly concern the creation of the film itself. Instead these are Hollywood stories set in Hollywood mansions and hotels, studio backlots, and executive offices. These films are populated with actors, directors, producers, casting agents, screenwriters, and other movie

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[85] Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: the metafictional paradox*, xi.
[86] Roland Barthes, *S/Z* [1970], 4.
[87] Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative*, 1.

people. This necessarily provides a different experience for the viewer. The boundary between fiction and reality, and between creator and consumer is less problematic in these films. Instead, the focus is an attempt to define Hollywood as a physical and psychological milieu. This is often presented as an impossible attempt as the increasingly global film industry disperses outward leaving a vacuum in its traditional centre. This void is also seemingly spiritually, or morally, bereft. In films such as Bernard Rose's *Ivansxtc.* (2000), David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire*, Sofia Coppola's *Somewhere*, and Terrence Malick's *Knight of Cups*, we watch vacuous or damaged characters wandering through sparse or alienating locations. This too operates within the edict of cinematic individuation. The viewer may become agitated and distanced when confronted with obnoxious protagonists (*Knight of Cups*). However, these films use disorientating horror tropes (Lynch), affective music (*Ivansxtc.*, *Mulholland Drive*, and *Knight of Cups*), and testing dureé (*Somewhere*), to connect with the audience and invite them to embody the abject conditions of these cipher-like characters.

I describe these films' self-evaluations as diagnoses of abjection. That they are concerned with white, mainly male, privileged protagonists, suggests that there is an anxiety over the stability of hegemonic identities in Hollywood. The operation of cinematic individuation requires that the privileged consumers of these auteurist works (cinephiles, academics, critics, people rich enough to go to the movies, etc.) perform a similar self-analysis of abjection upon themselves. They ask that the audiences undergo the anxiety of abjection in order to break down their sense of subjectivity—a necessary trauma in a process of deindividuation and, hopefully, reindividuation. It is notable that Kristeva describes abjection as 'a kind of *narcissistic crisis*'—using narcissism in relation to the creation of subjectivity in a similar manner to Hutcheon. Chapter 1's analysis of *Adaptation* demonstrates how the narcissisms of metafiction and abjection might intersect.

Bernard Stiegler gives an example of this singular connection and disconnection using Federico Fellini's *Intervista* (1987). He singles out a scene in which actors Anita Ekberg and Marcello Mastroianni (appearing as themselves) watch their own performances in *La Dolce Vita* (Federico Fellini, 1960). Stiegler states:

> *La Dolce Vita* is no longer simply a fiction for someone viewing *Intervista*: it has become its past, such that watching Anita watching herself perform the scene in *La Dolce Vita*, the viewer sees himself or herself passing by. This is true even if *La Dolce Vita* is not part of the viewer's past in the same way it is in Anita's, Mastroianni's, and Fellini's past; all three have actually lived what the spectator sees 'in the cinema'. *Intervista*, as a temporal object, is temporal in making the temporal object *La Dolce Vita*, lived by the characters in *Intervista* just as by its current viewers—each in a particular role—re-appear. Consequently, the viewer (of *Intervista*) is faced with the impossibility of distinguishing between reality and fiction, between perception and imagination, while (each in his or her particular role) *all* must also say to themselves, '*We* are passing by there.' [88]

By blending the boundaries between reality and fiction, past and present, audience and actor, and viewer and viewed, *Intervista* places us within the film, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the world outside of the film (via *La Dolce Vita*). There is a transference of emotional affect from Ekberg and Mastroianni to us, whilst the emotion shown by the 'characters' reasonably responds to the 'real' emotion of the actors. Stiegler describes the film as a 'temporal object' but it is also a technical object that connects us to the milieu of the cinematic world and connects the film to our own milieu. This is the crux of cinematic individuation: the creation of interior and exterior milieu that flow into each other. The two may then combine towards a wholly new third milieu.

The films I have selected span a period of twenty-one years, during which time the changing currents of both society and the film industry can be seen. The corpus represents a variety of production models and a range of aesthetic forms that are broadly categorised as 'self-reflexive'. They are auteurist works—all except *Adaptation* are 'written and directed

[88] Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3*, 24.

by…' (Rose shares screenplay credit for *Ivansxtc* with Lisa Enos). Of course, *Adaptation*'s director, Spike Jonze, and writer, Charlie Kaufman, have their own idiosyncratic careers beyond their collaborations with each other. Perhaps the desire to probe the abject qualities of modern life requires a certain monomania that comes with the territory of self-reflexive cinema. The abject figure is also isolated; just as a filmmaker's desire to reflect on their specific lifestyle/working conditions is also an isolating act. The focus on the privileged lives of the Hollywood elite often lays such films open to criticism of perceived narcissism. And it should be said, that a great deal of self-reflexive Hollywood fare is unbearably smug. See Doug Ellin's *Entourage* (2015) or Warren Beatty's *Rules Don't Apply* (2016) for further proof. While some of these films generate cinematic individuation on a more personal level, others do so on more observably general terms. As I will demonstrate, this is tied into specific aesthetic qualities, and wider industrial concerns.

The films in my thesis have a uniting thread in their admission of their own abject status—something that is concealed or repressed in glossier Hollywood tales like *The Artist* (Michel Hazanavicius, 2011) and *La La Land* (Damien Chazelle, 2016). Furthermore, each of these films experiments with various boundary pushing aesthetic and narrative devices in order to both represent and attempt to resolve the abject state. *New Nightmare*'s metafictional film-within-a-film setup is the first horror film to directly address how the marketisation and merchandise-potential of franchise movie-making had eclipsed the actual product itself. *Adaptation* uses a similar structure to show how the classical Fordist template for turning out films in Hollywood imbues both creator and audiences with a sense of entropy. *Ivansxtc* encouraged a deliberate style clash of harsh visuals (embracing cheap digital film) and romantic period music, literature, and philosophy to propose that we might resolve present problems through a combination of the past and the future. *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire* foreground female performance and discard narrative cohesion—although

performance and identity are also shown to be disintegrating. In these films, temporal and narrative progression ceases to be of any importance in the face of the destruction and reconstruction of subjectivity. *Somewhere* attempts to restore time and duration, but through a mode inspired by European new wave cinema from the 1960s and 1970s. The challenging experience of watching the film demonstrates how generic Hollywood narrative and filming choices might not be properly equipped to address the needs of a society sinking into abjection. *Knight of Cups* is an attempt to rectify this issue by utilising as many different cinematographic styles and narrative pathways as possible over the course of its runtime. The result is a fractured and impressionistic film which serves as an extreme forerunner for the type of cinema that might be to come.

Methodology

My methodology draws upon the broad field of film-philosophy. This is a close analysis project which uses a theoretical framework predicated upon theories taken from Gilbert Simondon, Gilles Deleuze, and Giorgio Agamben. As the thesis progresses, I incorporate romantic era philosophy including Arthur Schopenhauer and, prominently, Friedrich Nietzsche. I use this framework in order to build new concepts, to think about Hollywood as a system, and to analyse how specific film texts use certain aesthetic strategies to generate affects. My process in each chapter follows the same structure. Moving from broad industrial and cultural contextualisation, I introduce, reintroduce, and embellish my theoretical framework. I then conduct several close readings of my chosen films using said framework. Having contested the minutiae of specific moments, I then re-open my discussion back into the wider sociopolitical milieu.

Why use film-philosophy? Studies of specific film cultures are often predicated around industry analysis or general close reading. But whilst my project accounts for industrial conditions in Hollywood it is not an industrial analysis *per se*. And although there are several close readings of my corpus of films these are poststructural in nature. I am looking for the breakdown of subjectivity, abject experiences (both represented onscreen and transferred to the audience), and potential reindividuations. I hold a basic tenet that the self-reflexive nature of these films creates a discursive space for the viewer to contend and mediate upon such issues. Therefore, I need a framework which lends me the vocabulary (the tools) with which to conceive, describe, and evolve these ideas. Film-philosophy provides a platform and a series of strategies which I feel are the most coherent method of approaching that which can often appear incoherent and overwhelmingly complex.

A purely industrial study of Hollywood will identify financial, production, generic, and style trends. It will ultimately correspond with Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger's system. Whilst they vault a few allegorical hurdles, the work of Christensen and Connor also rests upon this system which does not account for the viewing experience engendered by the films. Cognitive film theory, through its adherence to a defined subject-object position, also maintains an element of distance between film and viewer. Thus, in the close readings to come one will encounter vocabulary predicated on ideas of abjection, social and technical individuation, zones of indistinction, powers of the false, and crystal-images. A connecting thread through all of these concepts is the collapse of previously solid subject and object positions.

Viewed from another angle, the close-readings carried out using framework also highlight how European philosophy from late modern history has circled around a crisis in subjectivity. When this lineage of thought is collated under the auspices of a quasi-industrial study we can see how central technology has been to this intellectual process. The prominent

position given in this thesis of Simondon's understanding of individuation is due to its ability to connect various structural levels: the industry (industrial apparatus), the *dispositif* (ideological apparatus), technology and image (technological apparatus), and the body.

Coming Attractions

Chapter 1 elucidates the historical and industrial contexts of my project and investigates the value, or lack thereof, of metafiction in *New Nightmare* and *Adaptation*. The former is used to explore the conditions of Hollywood in 1994, given that *New Nightmare* was the final film in production before New Line Cinema's takeover by Ted Turner, which effectively ended its time as an independent film studio. The year 1994 marks the start of my period of investigation as I see it as a cut-off point where the notion of a truly independent film becomes impossible as soon as a distribution company becomes involved. Thus, nearly all film productions become connected, albeit to greater and lesser extents, to the Hollywood mainstream. *New Nightmare* started an enduring trend in self-referential postmodern horror films, but this format is revealed to be ideologically exhausted: a kind of regressive postmodernism that no longer serves any purpose other than to instil a soporific detachment in its audience.

Later in the chapter I turn to *Adaptation* as, although it displays some of the metafictional shortcomings of *New Nightmare*, it is an example of the post-millennium abject anxiety that is endemic in my filmography. *Adaptation* pushes *New Nightmare*'s ideas of narratively constructed identity and reality to an extent that it engages with the structural and semiotic analyses in Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* [*Course in General Linguistics*, 1916], and Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie* [*Of Grammatology*, 1967]. *Adaptation* falls into many of the pitfalls of metafictional filmmaking but does present

possibilities for cinematic individuation in its closing stages; a sequence that abstracts various different, yet concurrent, concepts of time that both alienates the viewer from their sense of the world whilst granting them access to a deeper understanding of the construction (and constructedness) of this world.

Chapter 2 furthers the discussion of the act of adaptation addressed at the end of Chapter 1. In this case study adaptation occurs on an extra-textual level as Bernard Rose's film *Ivansxtc* transposes Leo Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886) to contemporary Hollywood. I propose that this explicit inter-mediality (in the sense that the film is in communication with other art forms) is something that all self-reflexive films are capable of, no matter how implicit their multimedia aspects may be. The film is notable as being the first to be shot on high definition digital video. Although the ontological question of digital cinema is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the development of the format resonates with the evolution of cinema as a technical object that is capable of cinematic individuation.

A close reading of *Ivansxtc* reveals a sustained dialogue with Deleuzian 'powers of the false' and with Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of 'the eternal return', as set out in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* [*The Gay Science*, 1882], and *Also sprach Zarathustra* [*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1883]. Both of these (related) theories can be used in conjunction with Deleuze's crystal-image, which I argue is a vital part of cinematic individuation. An analysis of the film's use of music provides an example of how cinematic individuation operates using a double structure of intellectual and corporeal exchange—seen here through Nietzsche's Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy—between the technical object that is the film and the organic being that is the viewer. This also incorporates aesthetic theories from Arthur Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* [*The World as Will and Representation*, 1818].

Chapter 3 explores the construction of performed identity and its associated milieux in David Lynch's Hollywood-set films *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire*. Whilst *Mulholland Drive* shows how identities can be formed, performed, and discarded, such concerns are pushed to an extreme limit in *Inland Empire*. In the latter film a Hollywood actress explores the process of role creation whilst passing through several distinct identities and their associated milieux. The chapter examines several scenes in both films that track this process through the films.

By presenting an overlapping and confusing proliferation of differences of identity and milieux, these films are engaging with Judith Butler's theory of performativity. These concerns are presented in a melange of disorientating film and narrative techniques that invoke Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis and Deleuze's time and crystal-images. By deploying devices designed to shock or break down the viewers' connection with the world—causing a kind of abject spectatorship—and by offering up the potential to change role and milieu, *Inland Empire* and, to a lesser extent, *Mulholland Drive,* act as an invitation to cinematic individuation and abject expressionism. *Inland Empire* is the first film encountered in this thesis that explicitly acknowledges the manner in which Hollywood production marginalises racial difference, a concern that is also addressed in *Knight of Cups*.

Chapter 4 continues the theme of eternal return from Chapter 2, and the experimentations with being, identity, and milieu that are explored in Chapter 3. Both Sofia Coppola's *Somewhere* and Terrence Malick's *Knight of Cups* deal with the Homeric journeys of film industry types across Los Angeles. In both cases the films are episodic and allow a series of loosely connected encounters and excursions to operate as milieux for the main character to pass through, in a similar fashion to the actress' performances in *Inland Empire*.

Somewhere concerns the search for meaning in a meaningless environment. It uses the Chateau Marmont hotel in Los Angeles as an abject zone of exception wherein several

individuations may take place. I use Deleuze's 'powers of the false' concept in order to read the film as an attempt to convey constant individuation and reindividuation. The film traces circuits both visually and thematically. If we follow these circuits, as spectators, we are led into Deleuzian confrontations between the virtual and the actual, and become potential subjects for cinematic individuation.

Knight of Cups is similarly metaphysical, albeit with references to John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), the tarot, the New Testament Apocrypha, and the Islamic philosophy of Suhrawardi that lend it theological overtones that are lacking in *Somewhere*. The film explores several ways of being, both through its diegesis and formally through its technical aspects. Close analysis of the relationship between the narrative and the visuals and audio shows how, within technical individuation, the technical object is that which connects the psychic, organic being to a world. I explicate Simondon's concept of aesthetic objects that create a field of mediation in which we can experience a world. Cinematic individuation in *Knight of Cups* is realised by presenting an empty (technical) organic being onscreen. It is here that the viewer understands that cinematic individuation cannot take place within the filmic object itself but relies upon the spectator to complete the circuit of psychic and tangible, and of actual and virtual, that resides inside the mediated space between film and viewer.

In my conclusion I describe the turn to abjection in contemporary Hollywood in terms of Gilles Deleuze's time-image cinema. I extrapolate that whilst the abject diagnoses found in self-reflexive cinema epitomise widely (and justifiably) held feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, they also open a crack for the light to get in. Building upon an idea of neo-romanticism in *Knight of Cups* from Chapter 4, I suggest that art that appeals to emotions and evokes affect can be a way to counter the 'post-truth' rhetoric that has surrounded the recent emergence of right-wing politics in Europe and the US.

Chapter 1 – Metafiction in *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* and *Adaptation*

which in the late 1990s, when even Wes Craven is cashing in on metafictional self-reference, might come off lame and tired and facile – David Foster Wallace[1]

Oh God comma I abhor self-consciousness – John Barth[2]

Under the long green hair of pepper trees,
The writers and composers work the street.
Bach's new score is crumpled in his pocket,
Dante sways his ass-cheeks to the beat.
– Bertolt Brecht, 'Hollywood Elegies'[3]

Introduction

In this chapter I analyse two metafictional films: *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (Wes Craven, 1994) and *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002). Both films present autopoietic narratives, in that they purport to be creating themselves as their plots proceed. Both construct films within films, and those films are ostensibly the films the viewer then watches. Both narratives eventually circle back on themselves, thus creating cinematic *ouroboroi*.[4] In each case I investigate whether metafiction is a suitable vehicle for cinematic individuation: a process whereby a spectator is simultaneously intellectually distanced from, and affectively attracted to, a film. This creates a mediated space wherein the viewer of the film can experience de/reindividuation of their subjectivity. As you will read, *New Nightmare* invites an (overly) intellectual structural reading, but at the expense of an emotional/sensory viewing experience. For this reason, I ultimately dismiss *New Nightmare* as self-sabotaging any attempt at cinematic individuation. I propose that such an attempt can be seen as a performance of

[1] Wallace, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (1999), 124. This quote comes from Wallace's short story *Octet*. He bemoans 'the tired old "hey-look-at-me-looking-at-youlooking-at-me" agenda of tired old S.O.P [standard operating procedure] metafiction' (130).
[2] Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), 116.
[3] Brecht, 'Hollywood Elegies'.
[4] The ancient alchemical and gnostic symbol of a serpent devouring its own tail.

failure that, in Thomas Elsaesser's understanding of the term, can also be regard as a failure to perform.[5] *New Nightmare*'s failure to perform cinematic individuation is indicative of Hollywood cinema in the early 1990s' wider failure to engage viewers on an affective level. I suggest that this is, at least in part, due to the industry's reconfiguration of itself through a variety of studio mergers and buyouts. Hollywood in the '90s was too occupied with securing its own position to pay much attention to its audience.

New Nightmare is highly useful for this dissertation as it demonstrates the historical and industrial conditions of Hollywood in 1994, the year that I suggest commences a new milieu of Hollywood filmmaking. This chapter begins with a thorough delineation of this historical context, paying particular attention to New Line Cinema, the production company behind *New Nightmare*. New Line provides an interesting example of an 'independent' film studio that was eventually consumed by a much larger studio (ultimately Warner Brothers). The recalibration of power in Hollywood following the success of smaller studios in the late 1980s and early 1990s was so rapid and effective that the boundary between mainstream and independent Hollywood is now impossible to map. This is endemic of Hollywood's current reflection of decentred globalisation whereby international co-productions are increasingly prevalent. For example, a film financed completely by a major studio and shot entirely in California is a rare bird these days. The move from a Fordist model of in-house production to a fragmented post-Fordist mode is now seen in the multiplicity of companies handling the financing, pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution and marketing of any one film. Following the money behind even low budget 'indie' films often leads to major studio subsidiaries or large media conglomerates. The water is further muddied by the bold advances into the industry made by video-on-demand (VOD) giants such as Netflix and

[5] Elsaesser, *German Cinema—Terror and Trauma: Cultural Memory Since 1945*, 8. This idea is unpacked later in this chapter.

Amazon which have allowed 'neglected' auteurs to operate with larger budgets and, seemingly, with greater creative freedom.[6]

I argue that the period (1994 – 2002) between this chapter's two case studies saw a rise in metafictional cinema that reflected an uncertainty surrounding the future of the industry. These metafictional narratives also harkened back to the heyday of American metafictional literature in the 1960s that questioned the state of the novel in the face of an uncertain and traumatic world. Perhaps inevitably, scholars have been quick to apply the same postmodern theories to these films that were used to analyse the literary forerunners. Hence they run into similar issues as in the 1960s concerning the futility of meaning, and the flattening of culture. Whilst I argue that this was only ever a narrow view of postmodernism and is subsequently an insufficient paradigm through which to analyse *New Nightmare*, I also conclude that the film's investment in its own ironic qualities restricts its potential to invoke cinematic individuation. It allows me to contextualise this project and work through the tangled knot of postmodern theory, but my close readings of three key sequences prove that it ultimately restricts the viewer's engagement (individuation) with it.

Adaptation also emerges from a significant period in contemporary Hollywood history. Distributor Columbia was part of a merger which saw Sony corralling its industry power by collating its various media divisions. I use Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida to explore how the films' narrative constructions of identity can be configured as a system of differences and interdependent relationships. I describe how *Adaptation* ends with a deconstruction and reconstitution of biological, technological, and human time. I see this as an exemplar of cinematic individuation—a process where a viewer is at once physiologically stimulated and cognitively alienated by a film—as it occurs temporally. *Adaptation*'s deconstruction and reconstitution of time runs in tandem to the de/reindividuation of the

[6] This is especially true for directors working in horror, sci-fi, or fantasy genres. See for example Bong Joon-ho's *Okja* (2017), Mike Flanagan's *Gerald's Game* (2017) and Duncan Jones' *Mute* (2018).

spectator's subjectivity under cinematic individuation. Whilst this process is arguably present in any film (who am I to tell you how a certain film will make you feel?), I merely wish to outline how it might operate structurally on a theoretical level, and to highlight moments within the films which resonate with this framework. The ultimate *telos* of this chapter is to show how the puzzle aspects of metafiction obscure the core purpose of contemporary self-reflexive cinema: to diagnose itself as an abject form of representation.

Hollywood, California: 1994

At the beginning of 1994, Bill Clinton was approaching the first anniversary of his inauguration as President of the United States of America; former president Richard Nixon would die this year, as would Kurt Cobain. In February Steven Spielberg's holocaust drama *Schindler's List* (1993) would win seven Oscars at the Academy Awards including Best Picture and Best Director. The short-lived American Independent film boom (described below as a decade long period between 1984 and 1994) would soon come to a stop.

Following the previously unthinkable box-office successes of *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975) and *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977) in the latter half of the 1970s, the Hollywood studios closed ranks.[7] Power moved from the directors and writers back, once again, into the hands of the studio heads, marketers, and financiers. The talent agency Creative Artists Agency [CAA] was founded in 1975 and, along with other agencies, expediated Hollywood's turn towards blockbuster hits—an agent being primarily concerned about securing the best financial deal for their clients, rather than the most artistically stimulating opportunity. The New Hollywood period was over. The 1980s were dominated by macho fantasies such as *Top*

[7] *Jaws* ($470.7 million) surpassed the global box office record held since 1972 by Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* ($245.1 million) by $225.6 million. This was in turn beaten two years later by *Star Wars* ($775.4 million), a whopping $324.7 million increase. All box office figures in this chapter are from www.boxofficemojo.com.

Gun (Tony Scott, 1986), and by big budget, high concept films aimed at family audiences such as Steven Spielberg's *E. T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) and Robert Zemeckis' *Back to the Future* (1985). Muscle men such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone starred in endless lucrative displays of masculine virility.[8]

At the same time, in New York, Jim Jarmusch made *Stranger Than Paradise* (1984). The film is an absurdist comedy starring the director's musician friends Richard Edson (formerly of Sonic Youth) and John Lurie (also on soundtrack duties) and shot by film school colleague Tom DiCillo. *Stranger Than Paradise* started life as an $8000 short film shot on leftover film stock donated by director Wim Wenders. This footage was then used as a calling card to secure an extra $100,000 from The Samuel Goldwyn Company in order to expand into a feature length film. It won awards on the European festival circuit (at Cannes and Locarno), and also (tellingly) at the Sundance Film Festival. It grossed $2.5 million, an impressive feat for a film that has more akin with Yasujirō Ozu and Samuel Beckett than with Indiana Jones. *Stranger Than Paradise* stood as the pilot light for a type of American filmmaking that ran counter to the excesses of Reagan-era Hollywood yet was still commercially viable. The bridge between these two disparate modes of production was Sundance. Robert Redford's, to this day enduring, Utah festival served as the gateway through which budding filmmakers might achieve greater exposure. Eventually, it worked the other way. Sundance became a window through which Hollywood could browse the wares of low-budget American cinema, cherry picking cheap hits, critical credibility, or a hot director to groom within the studio.

Sundance began as the Utah/US Film Festival in 1978. In 1984 the festival was taken over by Robert Redford's (who was already festival chairman) Sundance Institute and

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[8] See Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1994) and Paul Grainge, *Brand Hollywood*, (London: Routledge, 2008) for more on the market forces behind Hollywood's evolution in the latter half of the twentieth century.

renamed with its current moniker (initially informal but made official in 1991). In 1989 Steven Soderburgh brought his debut feature film *sex, lies, and videotape* to the festival, hoping to procure a distribution deal. A bidding war broke out between the Samuel Goldwyn Company and New Line Cinema before Miramax trumped them both to buy the rights for an eyebrow raising $2 million. *sex, lies, and videotape* went on to be a critical (winning that year's Palme d'Or at Cannes) and commercial success (grossing twenty times its modest $1.2 million budget). The latter statistic is particularly impressive given the film's R-rated subject matter. It was the first bonafide hit to come out of Sundance and paved the route for distributors such as Miramax and New Line to become big players in Hollywood, and for the festival to morph into the mass media event it is today. At the 2016 iteration of the festival Fox Searchlight set a new sales record by buying Nate Parker's slave drama *The Birth of a Nation* for $17.5 million. In 2004 Peter Biskind wrote that 'skeptics once feared that Sundance would be no more than a farm team for the majors, and it has become just that.'[9] As soon as indie film (heralded by *sex, lies, and videotape*) and independent studios became financially successful, they were inevitably absorbed into the Hollywood mainstream. As director Chris Eyre says: 'If you don't have a distributor, you're independent. If you have a distributor, none of us are independent.'[10] Given that all theatrical and streaming releases require a distributor, to be truly independent is to be invisible—at least in commercial terms.

By 1997 the largest independent studios had all been bought out by, or had merged with, the major studios. Miramax was bought by the Walt Disney Company in 1993; New Line was bought by Ted Turner in 1994; The Samuel Goldwyn Company was acquired by

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[9] Biskind, *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance and the Rise of Independent Film* (2004), 475. Biskind's book contains a detailed history of American independent cinema through his cases studies: Sundance and Miramax.
[10] Levy, *Cinema of Outsiders: The Rise of American Independent Film*, 1.

MGM in 1997, and Universal bought October Films that same year.[11] My specific focus in this chapter is on New Line, who in 1994 released *Wes Craven's New Nightmare*. This metafilm eerily reflected the then current state of affairs at New Line, and in the then-current US film industry.[12]

Robert Shaye started New Line Cinema in 1968. He ran it from his Greenwich Village apartment, securing distribution for niche European releases such as Werner Herzog's *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (1970) and Walerian Borowczyk's *Immoral Tales* (1976), re-releases with kitsch value such as the anti-cannabis propaganda film *Reefer Madness* (Louis J. Gasnier, 1936), and domestic distribution for John Waters' *Pink Flamingos* (1972). Despite having established arthouse and cult movie credibility as a distributor, nothing produced in-house made any impression at the box-office. In 1984, in dire financial straits, New Line produced and distributed Wes Craven's inventive horror film *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. The film grossed $25.5 million against production costs of $1.8 million and was a critical success. Over the next seven years, five sequels were produced by Robert Shaye at New Line. Whilst each made money, critical ratings trended steeply downwards.[13] The franchise allowed New Line to survive and expand. The low-budget, exploitation-tinged films released by New Line generated funds to be channelled into a new 'arthouse' division: Fine Line Features (in operation from 1991 to 2005). In the early 1990s New Line was

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[11] Aside from its purchase of Miramax Disney has steadily acquired both smaller and rival film studios: Pixar in 2006, Marvel in 2009, and Lucasfilm in 2012. In December 2017 Disney announced plans to purchase 21st Century Fox (which includes the movie studio 20th Century Fox) for $52.4 billion. This move makes Disney a dominant force in Hollywood and has sparked antitrust concerns in the US senate. See Dawn C. Chmielewski, 'Congressional Democrats Call For Disney-Fox Hearings Amid Antitrust Concerns', in *Deadline Hollywood* (18 December 2017), http://deadline.com/2017/12/disney-fox-antitrust-concerns-congressional-hearings-request-1202228114/ [accessed 19/12/2017].

[12] What J. D. Connor would call a 'production allegory'. See Connor, *The Studios after the Studios*.

[13] These films include *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (Jack Sholder, 1985), *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors* (Chuck Russell, 1987), *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master* (Renny Harlin, 1988), *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child* (Stephen Hopkins, 1989), *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* (Rachel Talalay, 1991). The most well received of the sequels, *Dream Warriors*, is notable for reuniting the heroine of the original film, Nancy (Heather Langenkamp), with Wes Craven (co-writer). Craven shares writing credit with Bruce Wagner, who would later write another Hollywood tale: *Maps to the Stars* (David Cronenberg, 2014).

churning out lucrative, albeit critically panned, sequels such as *Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III* (Jeff Burr, 1990), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Secret of the Ooze* (Michael Pressman, 1991), and *House Party 2* (Doug McHenry, 1991). At the same time, Fine Line were releasing critically acclaimed, and predominantly un-lucrative, 'auteurist' films such as *An Angel at My Table* (Jane Campion, 1990), *My Own Private Idaho* (Gus Van Sant, 1991), and *Night on Earth* (Jim Jarmusch, 1992).[14]

Biskind lays a certain amount of blame for the rapid commercialisation of independent cinema on an alleged feud between Shaye and the Miramax founders Bob and Harvey Weinstein. The perception being that Shaye set up Fine Line in order to compete for awards prestige with Miramax, whilst the Weinsteins set up genre offshoot Dimension Films in order to muscle in on New Line's exploitation racket. Eventually the score was kept on the balance sheet to the detriment of artistic merit. Biskind quotes former senior vice-president of production at New Line Janet Grillo as saying: 'as the risks became greater, we had to be more conservative, and that's when I started to see the death of independent film. The heartbreak was that it became harder and harder for films that were more personal or poetic. It no longer made business sense.'[15] This game of financial one-upmanship escalated to the point where personal gain far outstripped artistic integrity. It was inevitable then, that both companies would be bought out by larger companies within seven months of each other. On 30 June 1993 Miramax was purchased by Disney for $60 million; on 28 January 1994 New Line was bought by Turner Broadcasting System, before merging with Time Warner in 1996. Both companies produced what are arguably their signature films after their respective

[14] Of the 126 feature length films distributed by Fine Line, only twelve breached $10 million: *The Player* (Robert Altman, 1992; $28.9 million), *Hoop Dreams* (Steve James, 1994; $11.8 million), *Shine* (Scott Hicks, 1996; $35.9 million), *Crash* (David Cronenberg, 1996; $23.2 million), *Deconstructing Harry* (Woody Allen, 1997; $10.6 million), *Dancer in the Dark* (Lars von Trier, 2000; $45.6 million), *Saving Grace* (Nigel Cole, 2000; $26.3 million), *Elephant* (Gus Van Sant, 2003; $10 million), *Maria Full of Grace* (Joshua Marston, 2004; $12.6 million), *The Sea Inside* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2004; $38.5 million), *Vera Drake* (Mike Leigh, 2004; $13.3 million), and *Birth* (Jonathan Glazer, 2004; $23.9 million).
[15] Biskind, *Down and Dirty Pictures*, 160.

mergers. In 1994 Miramax produced Quentin Tarantino's Palme d'Or winning *Pulp Fiction*, now a stalwart entry on various 'best film' lists. Between 2001 and 2003, New Line produced Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which would eventually gross $2.917 billion. The Weinsteins departed from Miramax in 2005 to set up a new production company: The Weinstein Company. Miramax is now owned by global conglomerate beIn Media Group. In 2008 New Line became part of its parent company Warner Bros.

It is unfair (even if it is tempting) to blame Shaye and the Weinsteins for the destruction of something so vague as 'independent cinema'. Shaye rightly points out that 'independent is just a word that the eight established companies decided to apply to their competition when they designated themselves as majors.'[16] The entire label, then, was a form of manufactured othering that served to establish a boundary, and thus a division between the centre and the margin of film production. Categorisation, or any defined division, has the side effect of creating a marginalised group. Divisions between major and minor, mainstream and independent since 1994's event horizon are increasingly indiscernible. One finds the centre in the margin and the margin in the centre. This chapter's case studies, *New Nightmare* and *Adaptation*, are both auteur-driven works that critique mainstream Hollywood. But, the former is still part of a long-standing and well-milked franchise cash-cow, and the latter is a major studio prestige adaptation that mutated into a tricky metafilm. The locus of power (major or independent) cannot be pinpointed in either case. In fact, this dichotomy is misleading, as the US indie film movement in the 1980s and 1990s served as a smokescreen that obscured the fact that no true independent studios ever existed in the United States.

Or rather, independent cinema existed, but the distribution networks meant that it was never actually independent of the mainstream. The issue here is a semantic one. Certainly, there was, and is, an 'indie' sensibility where a filmmaker strives to create something of

[16] Levy, *Cinema of Outsiders*, 4.

greater personal expression or formal experimentation to the mainstream Hollywood product. But, because there is no independent cinema without a mainstream to be independent from, independent cinema always exists in tandem with mainstream cinema—each one infers the existence of the other. They exist *interdependently* with each other. To put it in the language of this thesis, they individuate together and deindividuate from one another. Independent cinema is the leftover potential from the preindividual brought into being by the individuation of the mainstream. They are both transindividual: always flowing into each other in a mutual exchange.

In 1994, this mask of independence was slipping. Less than two months after Miramax merged with Disney in 1993, Ted Turner was given approval by the board of Turner Broadcasting System (TBS) to purchase New Line.[17] The sale was ultimately confirmed on 28 January 1994. *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* started filming at the end of 1993 and was in post-production when the TBS deal went through. It was one of the few New Line films in production on either side of the corporate takeover and was one of the first significant releases for the Turner-era New Line. The fact that the film is so overtly self-reflexive, and muses upon the financial and aesthetic concerns of 1990s Hollywood and of New Line itself, provides an intriguing launching pad for this investigation into contemporary Hollywood.

Hollywood Plays Itself

The metafilm traces its roots to cinema's infancy when, in 1895, Louis Lumière turned his cinématographe to the site of production for *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon*. A later

[17] See Alan Citron, 'Turner Gets Nod to Buy New Line and Castle Rock: Entertainment: The deals, worth a combined $750 million, establish the cable mogul as a major Hollywood force', *Los Angeles Times* (18 August 1993), http://articles.latimes.com/1993-08-18/business/fi-25054_1_castle-rock-production [accessed 11/01/2017].

documentary *A Trip to Paramountown* (Jack Cunningham, 1922) presented a tourist-view of Hollywood and inspired a raft of Hollywood-set films including Paramount's own—now lost—*Hollywood* (James Cruz, 1923), Goldwyn's *Souls for Sale* (Rupert Hughes, 1923), and *Show People* (King Vidor, 1928) at MGM. At the same time, Buster Keaton was experimenting with modernist *mise en abyme* storytelling in *Sherlock Jr.* (1924) by having his projectionist protagonist cross into the onscreen world of a film-within-a-film. This was one of the earliest attempts to question the ontological differences, or lack thereof, between cinema and 'real-life'. The Hollywood-set film became, and still is, a well-established genre. Such films as *Sullivan's Travels* (Preston Sturges, 1941), *In a Lonely Place* (Nicholas Ray, 1950), *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950), *Singin' in the Rain* (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1952), and *A Star is Born* (George Cukor, 1954) are considered amongst the greatest ever made.[18] Recent onscreen representations of Hollywood range from historical hagiographies such as *The Aviator* (Martin Scorsese, 2004) and *Trumbo* (Jay Roach, 2015); comedies such as *America's Sweethearts* (Joe Roth, 2001) and *Seven Psychopaths* (Martin McDonough, 2012); historical screwballs such as *Hail, Caesar!* (Joel and Ethan Coen, 2016) and *Café Society* (Woody Allen, 2016); and horror films such as *Scream 3* (Wes Craven, 2000) and *Starry Eyes* (Kevin Kölsch and Dennis Widmyer, 2014). Occasionally these films are critically acclaimed like *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2000).[19] A greater number, such as *The Canyons* (Paul Schrader, 2013) and *Entourage* (Doug Ellin, 2015), are critically panned.[20] The metafictional elements practiced by Keaton have cropped up recurrently in films such as *Hellzapoppin'* (H. C. Potter, 1941), *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (Woody Allen,

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[18] The They Shoot Pictures, Don't They? website 1000 greatest films list uses 6,700 other best-of lists to create its own conglomerate ranking. The 2017 edition [http://www.theyshootpictures.com/gf1000_all1000films_table.php] lists *Singin' in the Rain* at #12, *Sunset Boulevard* at #39, *Sullivan's Travels* at #216, and *In a Lonely Place* at #271.

[19] *Mullholland Drive* is #64 on the 2017 TSPDT? Top 1000. A recent BBC poll of international film critics [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-37164880] resulted in *Mulholland Drive* being voted the greatest film of the 21st century.

[20] On reviewer aggregator website http://www.metacritic.com *The Canyons* and *Entourage* score 36/100 and 38/100 respectively.

1985), and *Last Action Hero* (John McTiernan, 1993). Recent films that deploy the device of transgressing the screen are rare, but it was used as a narrative gimmick for *The Final Girls* (Todd Strauss-Schulson, 2015).

What, then, accounts for such a long tradition of self-reflexive filmmaking?[21] Critical writing about the practice has tended to divide the films into two broad camps: those that celebrate Hollywood and the filmmaking process (*Singin' in the Rain*), and those that satirise and critique it (*Sunset Boulevard*). I argue that the relationship between Hollywood and those films that represent it is never so simple. Christopher Ames suggests that 'Hollywood-on-Hollywood films' are ambiguous in their attitude towards Hollywood as they 'resist the extremes of Hollywood evaluation—from the paeans to cinema as an uplifting and therapeutic medium to the jeremiads of cultural decline'.[22] The act of representation can never be wholly critical, as the very act of acknowledging Hollywood lends it status. A film such as *Swimming with Sharks* (George Huang, 1994) which presents Hollywood producers unanimously as power-crazed, moronic, corrupt psychopaths, nevertheless admits that they do hold power. The films that parody Hollywood in a gentler, more amicable way: e.g. *Singin' in the Rain*, *Get Shorty* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1995), or *Hail Caesar!* have the effect of deflecting criticism. As Hollywood has already told us that its studios are run by insane tyrants who stifle all creative expression, films that then use this as the basis for satire are not revealing anything audiences did not already perceive. Writing about novels that criticise political regimes and institutions, Rabih Alameddine suggests that by allowing a degree of 'controllable' criticism, a government can lend itself the appearance of being open and fair. If the critique goes too far 'the writer is marginalised, either deemed a "political" writer or put

[21] There are, of course, many fine examples of self-reflexive filmmaking outside of Hollywood. Famous movies about movies include *8 ½* (Federico Fellini, 1963), *Le Mépris* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963), *La Nuit américaine* (François Truffaut, 1973), and *Millennium Actress* (Satoshi Kon, 2001).
[22] Ames, *Movies about the Movies*, 19.

in a box to be safely celebrated as some sort of "minority" writer.'[23] There is an inverse to Hollywood's self-satirising smokescreen. No matter how benign a Hollywood-set film may be in its critique, it opens itself up to questioning. Why is this set in Hollywood? What is it trying to say with this portrayal? Sheer onanistic smugness may account for some self-reflexive cinema. After all, three recent winners of the Academy award for best picture (and four recent best director winners), even if not explicit Hollywood stories, contained some celebration of 'movie magic' and madness (Michel Hazanavicius' *The Artist* in 2011, Ben Affleck's *Argo* in 2012, and Alejandro G. Iñárritu's *Birdman* in 2014; all won for best director alongside Damien Chazelle for *La La Land* in 2016). Guy Lodge writes in *The Guardian* that such films are seen by some as 'emblematic of a kind of Hollywood solipsism, one that sees artists rewarding reflections of their world, their work, and their privileged problems over stories and crises that lie further from home.'[24] Perhaps, but are some films attempting to say more?

What can be extrapolated from this recent turn towards self-reflexivity? Reasonable answers might include: a new preening narcissism in the United States (emblematised by the forty-fifth president); a paranoid reaffirmation of Hollywood's power in reaction to exterior threats (a nationalist movement echoing global xenophobic political currents); a re-establishment of Hollywood as a locus of power following its own global expansionist ambitions; an ultimately smug *mea culpa* of self-satire; or, as I am exploring, a self-diagnosis of abjection. To an extent all of these answers are true, and in fact, they overlap and work together. The self-abjection of cinema is the means by which it can enter into Giorgio Agamben's zone of exception—a space devoid of law and the traditional markers and distinctions of society and identity.[25] It is in this denatured state that movements of

[23] Alameddine, 'Comforting Myths'.
[24] Lodge, 'La La Land and Hollywood's everlasting love affair with itself'.
[25] Agamben, *Stato di eccezione* [*State of Exception*, 2003], 50.

de/reindividuation occur. Through the process of cinematic individuation, spectators of these films can also be taken through this experience, the desired outcome being abject expressionism: the reconstitution of something productive that follows a traumatic disintegration of certainty, structure, and ultimately, subjectivity.

New Skin for the Old Nightmare

In 1961 the American novelist Philip Roth wrote, 'it stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's own meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist.'[26] Leaving aside the property magnate turned reality TV star turned president who dominates our current epoch, director Wes Craven came to a similar conclusion whilst preparing his film: *Wes Craven's New Nightmare*. Craven had toyed with the idea of having the *Elm Street* franchise's villain, Freddy Krueger, haunt the film set of a fictional *Elm Street* film as far back as 1987's *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*. Normally Freddy attacks his victims in their dreams and, on rare occasions, he emerges into the 'real' world. Craven aimed to have Freddy transgress a further boundary of reality and enter the world behind the camera. Keen to work with Heather Langenkamp who had played protagonist (and 'final girl') Nancy Thompson in the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, Craven set up a meeting.[27] Langenkamp revealed that she was now married to a special effects (SFX) technician with a young son. She had also experienced harassment from a stalker. Craven, thinking that Langenkamp's real life was more interesting than his scripted

[26] Roth, 'Writing American Fiction'.
[27] A final girl being a trope from slasher films from the 1970s onwards: the female protagonist who is usually the sole survivor from a group of disposable young victims. The term was conceived by Carole J. Clover in *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

characterisation of her, made the details of her actual life the narrative set-up for his new film.

Heather (herself), living a comfortable life in Los Angeles with her husband Chase (David Newsom) and her young son Dylan (Miko Hughes), is informed by New Line Cinema head Robert Shaye (himself) that Wes Craven is preparing to make a new *Elm Street* film and wants Heather to reprise her role as Nancy Thompson. Heather is unsure, but tentatively agrees upon learning that Robert Englund is returning to play Freddy. Terrifying visions and nightmares ensue, leading to the death of Heather's husband.

At the funeral, Heather has a startling vision of Freddy pulling her down into a grave. She is comforted by *Elm Street* co-star John Saxon (himself), who played Nancy's father Donald Thompson, and talks with Robert Englund (himself) who reveals he has been having visions of a darker, more menacing Freddy. Heather visits Wes Craven (himself) at his home in the Hollywood hills. Craven reveals that Freddy is in fact an actual demonic entity who has been kept imprisoned within the narrative of the *Elm Street* franchise, and the only way to keep him from entering the real world is to keep making films about him. As the actor who first vanquished Freddy, Heather's return to the series is key.

The climax of the film sees Heather return home only to find her house now exactly resembles the Thompson house from *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. She finds John Saxon in the front yard acting out his fictional persona of Donald Thompson. She allows the role of Nancy to take her over and Freddy emerges into 'reality'. He steals Dylan away into his purgatory-like domain. When Heather/Nancy follows, she finds a copy of the screenplay for *New Nightmare* which helps her vanquish Freddy. Heather and Dylan return home, where she once again finds the film's script along with a note of thanks from Craven. The film ends as she reads the screenplay from the start (exactly mirroring the start of *New Nightmare*) to Dylan as a bedtime story.

Although this synopsis makes the film seem overtly metafictional, the fourth wall is reasonably respected. There are three explicitly self-reflexive scenes which I will analyse in detail. The first is a TV talk show interview with Heather and Robert Englund; the second is the script meeting at Wes Craven's house; the last is the final (screenplay aided) showdown with Freddy. Aside from these scenes the film meanders at a pedestrian rate, for not only do these scenes tend to progress the narrative, they contain the most interesting ideological proposals on the nature of Hollywood, the horror film, and of fiction. Whilst I think the film uses metafictional techniques cleverly and aims to provide the necessary elements for cinematic individuation, I find it ultimately too cerebral for the parameters I laid out in the introductory chapter. When a film commits so fully to Brechtian distanciation it tips over into an Apollonian [purely rational and intellectual] category at the expense of any potential Dionysian [purely emotional and desire-driven] capacities. Cinematic individuation-proper has to involve both conscious and attentive cognition as well as unconscious affectivity. Films that provoke only cool objectivity will not allow viewers to follow and feel the onscreen abjection that is necessary to express new subjectivities and individuations. Whilst metafictions such as *New Nightmare* may inherently fail to invoke cinematic individuation, I propose that there is something productive within these 'failures', and something which allows us to consider what forms of cinematic representation ultimately can produce cinematic individuation.

The Talk Show

The talk show is the first scene in the film to truly turn its enquiring gaze inwards—presenting a relatively snide overview of debates surrounding the 'ethics' of horror films.

More pertinently, it sets up a peculiar succession of frames which engage with Gilles Deleuze's concept of the crystal-image, which I will explicate after the following synopsis.

The scene opens with Heather sitting next to interviewer Sam Rubin (himself). He briefly outlines the history of the *Nightmare* franchise and asks Heather if the fame has affected her. As Heather gives a vague non-committal response the camera cuts to a reverse angle wide shot of the audience. It pans right showing camera operators, technicians, and various members of the audience dressed as Freddy. The camera cuts to an over-the-shoulder medium shot of Heather followed by a reverse angle over-the-shoulder shot of Rubin. Behind Rubin we can see a TV monitor showing the previous camera angle. Thus, both the front and back of Heather's head can be seen [fig. 1.1]—the entirety of a shot-reverse-shot editing sequence in one frame. The camera cuts back to the previous angle before cutting to a long shot showing Heather and Rubin. A monitor in the foreground shows the same angle in a full shot. The picture on the monitor zooms in on Heather. Heather looks at that camera, and therefore looks out of the monitor at the viewer [fig. 1.2]. Rubin asks Heather whether she lets her son Dylan watch the horror films she stars in and Heather laughingly replies in the negative.

Figure 1.1. The positioning of the video monitor means that there are two versions of Heather in the frame. This also shows an impossible view of her in that we can see both the front and back of her head simultaneously.

Figure 1.2. In this setup the angle is slightly altered in order to achieve the effect of Heather staring out of the monitor directly into the camera.

Rubin is getting to the climax of the interview when he asks about a potential new sequel (Heather has not been told of the plans for the new film yet) and whether Freddy is

‘really dead’. Heather insists nervously that Freddy is ‘dead and gone’ and Rubin asks if Heather would trust Dylan alone with Freddy actor Robert Englund. She laughs but replies ‘I don’t know…’ A close-up of Heather shows her looking worried as Rubin introduces Englund as a surprise guest.

Englund bursts through the studio wall (evidently made of paper) in full Freddy makeup and costume. A return to the previous close-up shows Heather smiling yet still uneasy. A long shot of the audience shows them whooping and standing to applaud. Jazzy talk show music blares out. A brief return to the setup in figure 1.2 shows Heather and Englund on the monitor. Close-up shots show the delighted reactions of members of the audience and of Rubin. In character, Englund laughs and shouts ‘love ya babe. We’ll do lunch’.

The camera pans to follow Englund as he dances down to the front of the stage. A long shot of the audience pans to show the intensity of the crowd who, having seemed restrained and well-dressed earlier (bar a few Freddy costumes), now seems to be populated with characters from a post-apocalyptic action film. A strong spotlight casts a long-shadowed silhouette of Englund facing the crowd. A close-up on Heather shows the shadow of Englund/Freddy crossing her face [fig. 1.3]. The camera picks out an audience member dressed as Freddy and pans left and down to the real thing (Englund). Consecutive long shots show Englund run into the audience to high-five someone with a Freddy knife-glove (with a clearly post-mixed ‘clink’) and run back to the stage. The film cuts to a TV camera operator swivelling to keep Englund in shot.

Figure 1.3. As Englund plays to the gallery he casts a portentous shadow, that of Freddy, across Heather's face.

The camera then returns to the silhouetted setup of Englund and shows the spotlight filtering through his glove [fig. 1.4]. We see Heather in close-up and the camera slowly zooms in as Englund's shadow extends its glove across her face. She gulps as eerie non-diegetic synth music plays and Englund delivers a famous Freddy line: 'you are all my children now!' The final shot of the scene is a closer shot of Englund waving and posing in the spotlight, slowed down as the score continues.

Figure 1.4. Robert Englund (in Freddy costume) makes abstract patterns and shadows in the gleam of the spotlight. This shot is a visual reference to a scene in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) where a journalist waves his arms in front of the beam from a film projector.

This scene serves to set out what is at stake in *New Nightmare*. Craven introduces his audience to the metafictional construction of his film as gently as possible. Thus, we are presented with an instantly recognisable product of 1990s US television: the ingratiating-accusatory duel format of the tabloid chat show. The huge popularity of *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (1986 – 2011), the proliferation of cable T.V. channels, high profile scandals (O. J. Simpson, Monica Lewinsky, etc.), and the print and television media scramble for ratings in the '90s all contributed to what David Kamp described in *Vanity Fair* as the 'Tabloid Decade'.[28] A widely observable symptom of this was the tabloid chat show. On these shows celebrity guests (such as Heather) were fawned over, whilst members of the public were berated for their moral shortcomings. This format was made infamous by shows like *The Jerry Springer Show* (1991 – 2018) and *Ricki Lake* (1993 – 2004). They feature vulnerable members of society such as the unemployed, petty criminals and drug addicts.

[28] Kamp, 'The Tabloid Decade'.

These guests are shamed and antagonised, often to the point of violence. Social stigmas of the time (1990s), such as single mothers (what Heather will shortly become), were frequently attacked, as were examples of so-called bad parenting, e.g. exposing young children to grisly horror films. This is shown from a position of dramatic irony in *New Nightmare*. Craven presents a humorous postmodern version of Freud's Oedipal complex, wherein a child is psychologically damaged and possessed by watching horror films made by his mother when she was a teenager. He is driven mad by this mediated character played by his mother, whom he can watch over-and-over on the VCR. Tellingly, his father is killed and emasculated (by being stabbed in the groin) and he ends the film in bed with his mother. This jokiness at the expense of psychoanalysis suggests that Craven finds the notion that horror causes psychological damage risible.

This media parody is not designed to provoke debate amongst the audience, and Craven appears to be undermining potential theoretical (specifically psychoanalytic) readings of the film. Instead, it allows him to establish the various ontological levels. These encompass both characterisation and layers of reality. The former would include the character Freddy Krueger as played by the character Robert Englund, both of whom are played by the actor Robert Englund. The latter includes the dreamscape (which includes a facsimile of the *Elm Street* world), the setting of Hollywood (both fictional and real), and the reality of the viewer and of the actors playing themselves. When Rubin introduces Robert Englund, who then appears and performs as Freddy, the ontological layers are compressed. According to Frank Pilipp:

> *New Nightmare* shows us Hollywood *total* in that it eliminates the oppositions between diegetic levels and blends everything into universal fiction. All of a sudden Freddy steps out of his fictional guise and into the *role* of Hollywood actor Robert Englund. Hollywood actors, even as 'real' people, are presented as constantly on stage and exhibit only another fictional persona the public has created for them.[29]

[29] Pilipp, 'Creative Incest: Cross- and Self-Referencing in Recent Hollywood Cinema', 60.

The point of the scene is not, therefore, to address issues of ethics in horror film, but to define the inherent performativity of a life lived within the media sphere. Figure 1.3 tellingly shows Heather multiplied, exposed, and trapped. The studio monitors allow Craven to show multiple angles of Heather. This effectively creates two Heathers, one profilmic (yet also filmic) and one onscreen in the monitors. At times, given the difference in camera angles, these doubles appear to act independently of each other. One Heather looks offscreen whilst the Heather in the monitor looks directly at the audience. Further layers are added by the discussion of Heather as the film character Nancy, and by the viewer's awareness of the existence of the Heather Langenkamp who exists outside of the film. Such prior knowledge makes the 'real' Heather in *New Nightmare* as much an onscreen Heather as the one we see through the TV studio monitors.

In figure 1.1 the framing is such that we see the back of the real Heather's head and simultaneously see the face of the monitor Heather.[30] This lends her a curious two-faced Janus-like aspect. Later in the film, Heather will be described by Wes Craven as 'a gatekeeper'. Adding to this the film's treatment of transgressions between various layers of reality and the circular nature of the narrative, this reference to the Roman god of transitions, doorways, and beginnings and endings is cute.[31] This also demonstrates the media exposure of Heather. She can turn her face from the camera but cannot hide it. The angle in this shot suggests that she can see herself looking back at herself at all times throughout this scene. She cannot escape from her own various mediated and performed doubles.

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[30] This shot differs from a more traditional mirror shot in that the image corresponds to Heather. I.e. it is not 'mirrored'.

[31] Thomas Elsaesser has described 'modernity' as 'Janus-faced' in that it inscribes progress, mobility, and production whilst at the same time sowing fragmentation and alienation. See Thomas Elsaesser, 'Modernity: The Troubled Trope', in *The Visual Culture of Modernism*, eds. D L Madsen & M Klarer (Tübingen: Narr, 2011), 24 – 25.

This leads to a comparison with Deleuze's crystal-image, as the lack of perceptible difference between the real Heather and her monitor doubles constitutes the smallest circuit of time between actual and virtual. Deleuze elucidates that 'the smallest circuit that functions as internal limit for all the others and that puts the actual image beside a kind of immediate, symmetrical, consecutive or even simultaneous double.… There is a formation of an image with two sides actual *and* virtual'.[32] Deleuze was inspired by Henri Bergson to devise a concept where the present moment is constantly split into virtual past and actualising movement into the future. What is crystalline is that which is constantly forming and reforming itself in a state of perpetual becoming. Deleuze gives an example of the instant playback of the video monitor as necessarily producing a crystal-image by the example of an actress watching her performance on a monitor in Jean-Luc Godard's *Passion* (1982). By producing a crystal-image within the marketing and self-promoting environment of a chat show, Craven appears to make a point about the 'indiscernibility' of Heather's statuses as an actor, a character, a character playing a role, and a mediated marketing tool.

As mentioned in the introduction, the crystal-image can be deployed in order to provoke cinematic individuation. The instantaneous monitor double of Heather makes the difference between actual present (which can only ever be experienced as virtual) and virtual past indiscernible. We know that there must be a delay between action as it occurs in real time and the relay to a monitor. On a sensory level, this is imperceptible.[33] The indiscernible video double is an example of what Deleuze and Friedrich Nietzsche termed 'powers of the false', in that it troubles the authenticity of the original. The original Heather's authenticity is already tenuous due to our knowledge that the actress Heather Langenkamp is performing a version of herself for *New Nightmare*. In fact, following the argument that Heather is constantly performing under the media spotlight, this could be described as a performance of

[32] Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time Image*, 71 – 72.
[33] In Buddhism this would be configured as sensible, but not actual.

a performance of a performance of a performance of a performance. To put it more clearly, (1) Heather Langenkamp performs her original identity but (2) as a Hollywood actor must perform her image. She (3) performs the role of herself for the purposes of this film. Within this performance she (4) also performs for the media and the fans. Finally, she must (5) perform the role of Nancy Thompson in the film-within-a-film. Each level of this Chinese-box-ontology further compromises any sense of authentic identity or, ultimately, allows us to realise that no such thing ever existed.

This crystal-image of monitor doubles also gives rise to another Nietzschean concept: 'the eternal return'—that which is continually returning to that which differs. In figure 1.2 the monitor double acts differently to Heather by staring directly at the viewer. Whilst this can be explained by a clever setup of two different camera angles, the moment is unsettling. The viewer is unlikely to think rationally about the filming setup in the heat of the moment. Due to the imperceptible time delay between real time Heather and monitor Heather, the latter is in fact a repeat of the former. In the playback, Heather performs differently. She looks at the camera and out at the viewer. As Deleuze proposes, the eternal return does not describe endless repetition of the same, but the return to difference (alterity). It is in this way that the world and its inhabitants progress. History may repeat itself, but it does so differently.

This endless return to 'false' simulacra has the effect of creating exterior and interior milieux which blend into one another. The exterior milieu is established as the TV studio, yet the monitor-Heather's nervous glance into the camera suggests an interior, psychic milieu. The monitor itself (from which she looks) is still very much a part of the established exterior milieu. The look to the camera is at least an attempt to establish a connection with the viewer and could even be a cry for help. Suddenly the film screen becomes Heather's interior milieu, and the realm of the spectator becomes her exterior milieu. Likewise, this sudden self-awareness of the situation provoked by the direct gaze of the film's audience establishes

a new exterior milieu for the viewer: the onscreen world. Heather comes out, and we go in—and back again as we experience social individuation with her.

The audience is provided with an inhuman view of Heather. To see the back of a person's head at the same time as the front is, if not impossible, unnatural. Such an inhuman perspective has the effect of placing Heather into a state of abjection. She is both multiplied and dissected—her head sliced in two so as to provide this surreal point-of-view. In this sense, she is both diminished (the viewer suspects that both 'halves' of her head are missing the other half) and excessive (there are two of her). Both conditions are abject in that they disregard the physical borders of her body; the former being insufficient, and the latter spilling out of its container. The gaze of her onscreen double represents the gaze of the other staring back at her (and at us). She is both herself, and also an uncanny other. Likewise, this also casts the viewer into a state of abject spectatorship. The viewer's perception matches that of the camera's and thus the viewer becomes aware of themselves as occupying a monstrous position. There is a sense of double othering, Heather by her awareness of the viewer, and the viewer by their sense of having their perspective forced into an inhuman position. This is the creation of an abject zone of exception through which expressive qualities might arise (abject expressionism). Since we must traumatically lose ourselves in order to rediscover ourselves, the viewer's sense of their own structures is assaulted in this shot, resulting in a pliability that is ripe for the de/reindividuation that occurs within cinematic individuation. A moment of vulnerability prior to us re-establishing our subject-object relationship with the film.

The spell is sadly dissipated by Craven's attempt to insert a further reflexive device, the 'special guest' Robert Englund. As Englund rips through the walls of the set he in fact tears through the fragile fabric of the zone of exception that had engulfed Heather and the viewer. When Craven adds in visual foreshadowing, and cinematic in-jokes (figures 1.3 and 1.4), the audience is gently led back to a detached position of genre-literacy and cinephilic

appreciation. For those not *au fait* with the references on show, it is possible that this will be less effective. Englund's entrance does however emphatically breach the preceding setup and its ambiance, regardless of one's knowledge of the character.

Wes Craven's House in the Hills (Have Eyes)

This scene is the metafictional hinge of the film. Not only does it lift the curtain to unmask the wizard/creator/author/god of the film that is Craven, but it introduces the notion that the film is autopoietic.[34]

Heather's car winds its way up into the Hollywood Hills and a shot showing a swimming pool in the foreground and the ocean far below in the background establishes a luxury house.[35] The sunset glints off the pool and silhouettes Wes Craven and Heather against the sky [fig. 1.5]. As Craven leads Heather inside he discusses his writing process based on dreams: 'I dream a scene at night; I write it down in the morning'.[36] 'At least tell me what it [the film] is about so far' says Heather. Craven reveals 'what the nightmare is about so far'. He says, 'It's about this entity … it's old, it's very old. It's existed in different forms and different times. But the only thing that stays the same is what it lives for'. 'What is that?' asks Heather. Craven stops and turns to face Heather. 'The murder of innocence' he responds

[34] Autopoiesis was originally devised by biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela in 1972 to describe the self-regulation of cells. See *De Maquinas y Seres Vivos* [*Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of Living*] (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria S.A., 1972).

[35] When I presented a paper on *New Nightmare* at York University in which I examined this scene, I was asked by a member of the faculty, 'when we see these privileged Hollywood people hanging around their infinity pools [fig. 1.5 shows that it is not an infinity pool], why should we care about their problems?' Perhaps Craven worried about this too. In the original draft he wrote himself as having gone mad and living in the camper van from *The Hills Have Eyes* (Wes Craven, 1977) driven by Michael Berryman, who played the cannibal Pluto in that film. In reality, and at the time of shooting, Wes Craven lived in the rather more modest beach house that stands in for Robert Englund's house in the film. The mansion in the hills belonged to the considerably more successful James Cameron.

[36] This is a call back to the original *Elm Street* film, in which Glen (Johnny Depp) discusses 'Balinese dreamskills.' Amongst other things, he claims that the Balinese 'get all their art literature from dreams. Just wake up and write it down. Dreamskills.'

before walking out of shot. The camera tracks Heather as, after a beat, she follows Craven. 'This is still a script we're talking about?' she asks. He replies, 'well I sort of think of it as a nightmare in progress'. They are now both seated on white leather sofas. A statue of robot Maria from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) stands on the coffee table—*New Nightmare* not only references the *Elm Street* series but constantly gestures towards other famous films.

Figure 1.5. A California sunset reflects off Wes Craven's pool in Hollywood Hills.

Heather asks if 'this thing has any weaknesses'. The camera cuts to a medium close-up of Craven. Behind him a mobile hanging from the ceiling forms a similar shape to the cracks caused by earthquakes in Heather's house. Both these visual motifs resemble Freddy's knife-glove. Craven says:

> it can be captured sometimes … by storytellers of all things. Every so often they imagine something so good as to sort of catch its essence and then for a while it's held prisoner in the story … the problem comes when the story dies. And that can happen in a lot of ways. It can get too familiar to people or someone waters it down to make it an easier sell. Maybe it's just so upsetting to society that it's banned outright. However it happens, when the story dies the evil is set free [ellipses refer to various inane reaction comments from Heather].

As low ominous synth tones begin to build on the score, Heather clarifies: 'You're saying Freddy is this ancient thing?' Craven replies 'for ten years he's been held captive in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series but, now that the films have ended the genie is out of the bottle.' Heather asks Craven what Freddy is doing in his dreams as the camera cuts to a two-shot and slowly dollies in. A sinister melody begins to play on the score. Craven replies that the entity likes being Freddy and is used to 'our time and space'. A reaction close-up of Heather is followed by a close-up of Craven who says 'he's decided to cross over. Out of films and into our reality.'

Heather asks if somebody can stop Freddy. The score is repeating its melody at ever higher pitches as Craven reveals that there is a figure in his dreams, 'a gatekeeper [like the deity Janus]. Somebody Freddy needs to get by before he can come into our world … That person's you Heather.' The reaction shot of Heather shows her shock as she asks why. Craven answers 'dramatically speaking it makes perfect sense. You played Nancy after all and you were the first to humiliate him, defeat him.' 'Oh my god Wes. Did you know?' asks Heather. The main theme is now playing on the score. 'It was a script; it was a dream. I didn't know', he stutters. Heather responds angrily.

Craven stands up and the camera cuts to track Heather following Craven into a study space with a computer. The camera cuts to a medium shot of Heather as she asks, 'how can we stop him?' Craven replies that 'the only way to stop him is to make another movie.' A close-up of Heather shows the top half of her face obscured by shadow. This is followed by a close-up of a photograph of the young cast of the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. Craven assures Nancy that he will not move from the computer until he has finished the script (despite supposedly relying on dreams for script ideas), but that Heather will ultimately have to choose 'whether or not you're willing to play Nancy, one last time'. The theme music halts and after a second an eerie music box melody starts to play. The camera cuts to a close-up of

the computer screen revealing that the dialogue of the preceding scene was already written in Craven's script (although the insert of the script is not scripted). The final lines in the screen read 'FADE TO BLACK' [fig. 1.6]. The film obliges.

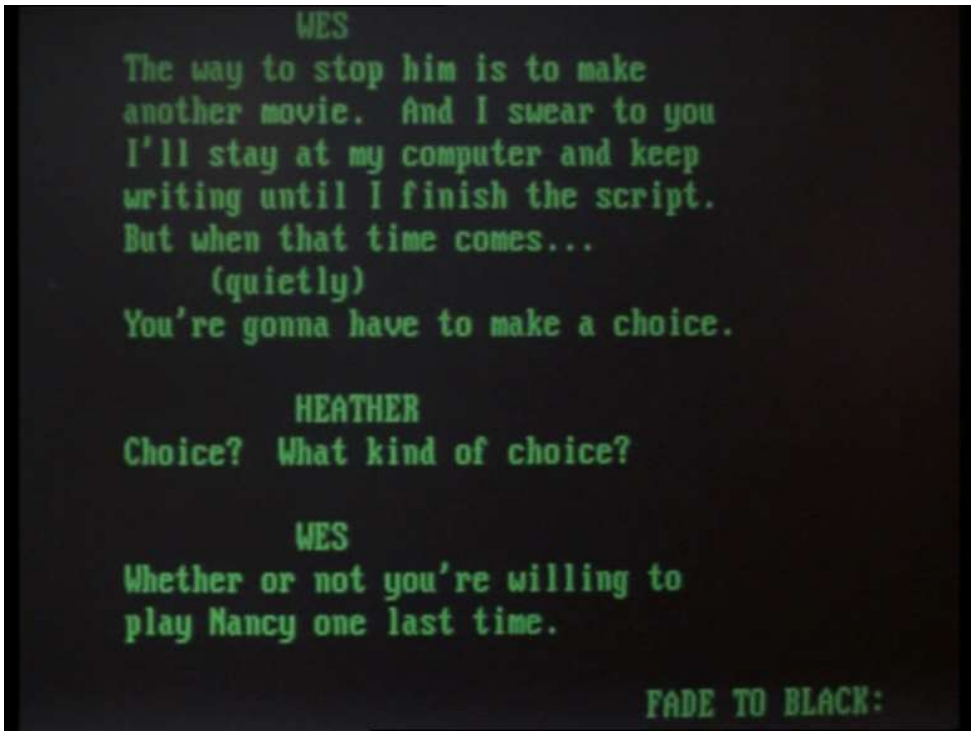

Figure 1.6. Craven's computer screen reveals that either the script is writing itself, or that reality is pre-scripted.

Kendell R. Phillips finds the addition of this extra ontological level exasperating. He declares that 'the multiple layers of mirrored narrative realities—dreams, scripts, films-within-films, and so on—bleed so thoroughly into each other that any clear standpoint becomes virtually impossible.'[37] Phillips finds the absence of clarity to be distressing. However, it is precisely such a breakdown of categories that alerts me to cinematic individuation.

Craven's description of Freddy as an evil entity entrapped by language and narrative echoes Giorgio Agamben's argument that 'language itself, which is perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses—one in which thousands and thousands of years ago a primate inadvertently

[37] Phillips, *Dark Directions*, 85 – 86.

let himself be captured, probably without realising the consequences that he was about to face'.[38] Within this paradigm Freddy represents a creative potentiality that was lost at the advent of human civilisation. Think of the shame associated with knowledge in 'The Fall' from the *Book of Genesis*. Creation is reconfigured as an antagonistic power which must continually be quelled through linguistic and narrative systems. The unfettered potential of savage (demonic) life is constantly controlled through the civilising and structuring effect of language. There is a sense here that true becoming is being negated, and that some access to a pre-linguistic state might grant insight into powerful new developments of being.

Craven's description also connects with Ferdinand de Saussure's conception of language as a system. Saussure defines language as a system of differences. He proposes 'a linguistic system of phonetic differences matched with a series of conceptual differences … the essential function of a language as an institution is precisely to maintain these series of differences in parallel.'[39] This is strikingly similar in not only structure, but even wording, to Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger's insistence upon Hollywood as a system of difference. Bordwell describes the filmic output of Hollywood as a multiplicity of oppositional films that weigh their differences against each other in order to present the effect of a homogenous whole as 'an unstable equilibrium of classical norms.'[40] For all its supposedly postmodern tricks, *New Nightmare* is generally filmed conventionally, with shot-reverse-shot exchanges, typical horror-film scoring (creepy music boxes or sinister lullabies, phrygian and minor modes, etc.), and easily legible visual motifs such as the cracks on the wall and shadows that represent Heather's psychological stress, as well as Freddy's glove (see fig. 1.4).[41] This is

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[38] Agamben, 'What is an Apparatus?', in *What is an Apparatus? And other Essays*, 14. Bernard Stiegler proposes a similar argument in *Technics and Time, 1*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998).
[39] Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* [*Course in General Linguistics*, 1916], 141.
[40] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 5.
[41] The music-box/lullaby association with horror films stems from, or was at least popularised by, Krzysztof Komeda's theme 'Rosemary's Lullaby' from Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968).

directly comparable to Saussure's metaphor of a linguistic system as a chess game. He describes how if a chess piece goes missing some arbitrary object might be used to replace it, provided the players agree that it carries the value of, say, a rook: 'Thus it can be seen in semiological systems, such as languages, where the elements keep one another in a state of equilibrium in accordance with fixed rules, the notions of identity and value merge'.[42] By placing an 'evil entity' into the linguistic system that is narrative, and imbuing it with the 'identity and value' of a Hollywood slasher movie villain, the 'storyteller' has the effect of fixing meaning. Thus, forced to abide by the rules of the system, the aberrant entity is suspended within the story, and can now be tamed and controlled. In such cases, cinematic individuation is nullified. When narratives successfully contain their demons they also thwart their audience's capacity to interact with them in a way that might provoke de- and reindividuation.

Following Saussure, Jacques Derrida conceives of *différance*. *Différance* is what differs, and what defers and postpones. Derrida sees this as the origin of language, and thus also of life. It is the constant evasion of the present moment. As life is constantly moving towards an unreachable (terminally deferred) present, life is protected and prolonged indefinitely. Derrida writes that the origin of language is marked by distress: 'absolute fear would then be the first encounter of the other as *other*: as other than I and as other than itself. I can answer the threat of the other as other (than I) only by transforming it into another (than itself), through altering it in my imagination, my fear, or my desire.'[43] Using this paradigm, the evil entity that is Freddy corresponds to the 'absolute fear' that marks the first encounter with the other. But by giving the evil entity/other a legible form and coherent motive in the shape of the movie monster Freddy Krueger we perform a deferral that serves to protect us against the alarming other. The propagation of *Elm Street* films that Craven claims is the only

[42] Saussure, *General Linguistics*, 130.
[43] Derrida, *De la grammatologie* [*Of Grammatology*, 1967], 227.

way to keep Freddy trapped in narrative also provides an outlet through which the other can be deferred. The creation of the cartoonish monster Freddy is itself a deferral of the originary other (the 'entity' which takes us out of the fragmented real that precludes the mirror stage).[44] What is beyond horror and beyond experience is made merely horrific—within the realm of experience—by 'trapping' it in a narrative/linguistic system.

Subtly shifting from questions of self and other to those of temporality, Derrida suggests that 'to say that *différance* is originary is simultaneously to erase the myth of a present origin. Which is why "originary" must be understood as having been *crossed out* … it is a non-origin which is originary.'[45] The erasure of the axis of originary and present is shown at the end of the scene. The script (fig. 1.6) that is either self-generating, or prophetic, shows that the present is already past (is already written) and conversely that the past is present (is enacted).

The Final Showdown

This final sequence sees the film fulfil its metafictional premise as the boundaries between reality, dream, film, and previous (performed) lives disintegrate. Narrative and language are shown to win out over unsettling forces; ultimately (as I shall explain) leading to a nullification of life itself.

Having failed to stop Freddy abducting Dylan, Heather runs home. Attentive viewers will have noticed that she now has a grey streak in her hair following a nightmare in a hospital. This mirrors the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street* where a lock of Nancy's hair turns grey after a nightmare in a 'dream clinic'. There she finds her friend and former co-star

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[44] See Jacques Lacan, 'Identification via "*ein einziger zug*"' (1961), in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII: Transference*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Cambridge: Polity, 2015).
[45] Derrida, *L'écriture et la difference* [*Writing and Difference*, 1967], 255.

John Saxon (himself) and Dylan. She tells Saxon that 'Fred Krueger did it'. Saxon replies 'yeah sure' and the often-heard creepy music box motif starts playing on the score. Dylan starts reciting the infamous Freddy nursery rhyme that is used throughout the film series.[46] '*Nancy*, let's go outside [my emphasis]', suggests Saxon, now referring to Heather by her character's name. A shot of Dylan's bed shows it violently shaking before something begins to emerge from within it.

The camera tracks backwards as Saxon and Heather leave the house. Once again, he calls her 'Nancy', but this time she notices. 'Why are you calling me Nancy, John?' she asks. 'Why are you calling me John?' he retorts (Saxon plays Nancy's father in the series). Saxon walks out of shot and a police radio is heard. The camera cuts to a three-quarter-shot of Saxon who is now in his police lieutenant costume from the *Elm Street* films. The camera tracks in on Heather's face before seamlessly cutting to a shot that zooms in on Saxon's police badge and gun. The camera tracks Heather following Saxon and asking him to call 'Robert Englund, the guy who plays Freddy Krueger'. This sequence is interspersed with shots of Freddy slicing through Dylan's bedsheets. Saxon turns to Heather and declaims: 'Freddy's dead'. As Saxon gets into a police car to leave, Heather accepts her role as Nancy, telling him 'I love you too. Daddy.' Accordingly, the next shot of Heather shows her costume [fig. 1.7] to now be the same that she wore in the climax of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* [fig. 1.8]. As she runs back into the house the camera reverse tracks to show that her house is now the original *Elm Street* house that Nancy lived in [fig. 1.9]. The Freddy nursery rhyme is recited non-diegetically.

[46] 'One-two Freddy's coming for you / three-four better lock your door / five-six grab your crucifix / seven-eight gonna stay up late / nine-ten never sleep again'.

Figure 1.7. Having accepted her ‘role’ as Nancy, Heather suddenly appears in a different costume.

Figure 1.8. A very similar outfit to the one she wore at the climax of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.

Figure 1.9. Her house is now the same as the original Elm Street house where the Thompsons lived.

Heather walks through the house (still the *New Nightmare* set) until she comes across the unplugged TV showing the climax of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* [fig. 1.10]. She follows a 'breadcrumb trail' of sleeping pills to Dylan's bedroom. She takes them in order to sleep, and enters Freddy's Hieronymus Bosch-like realm through a vaginal portal in the bed [figs. 1.11, 1.12]—a painterly allusion that evokes limbo rather than hell. Heather searches for Dylan through a labyrinthine lair that resembles classical Greek and Roman architecture.

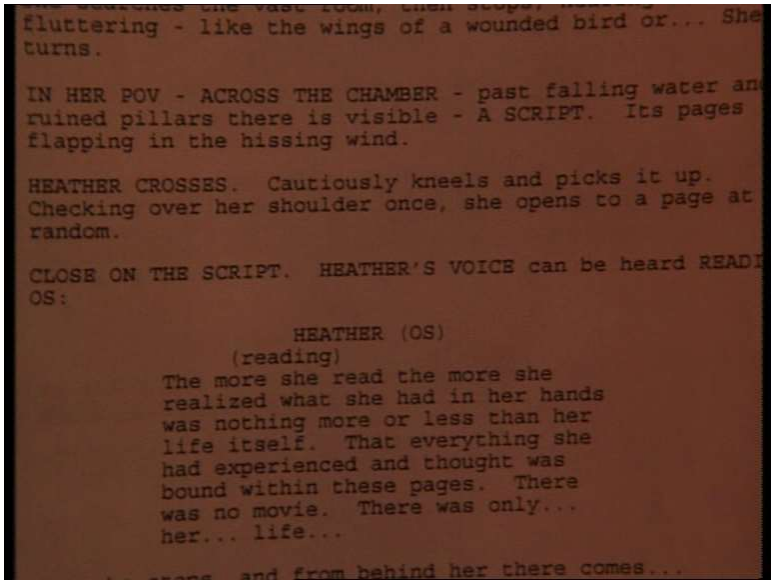
Figure 1.10. Heather comes face-to-face with her younger self, similarly attired, as the TV plays *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.

Figure 1.11. Freddy's domain evokes Hieronymus Bosch and M. C. Escher.

Figure 1.12. In particular Bosch's *Christ in Limbo* (circa. 1575). This visual reference suggests that Freddy's realm is not Hell, but a liminal world between earth and the underworld.

A POV shot shows some fluttering pages on the ground and tracks towards them. A medium close-up reveals them to be a script which Heather bends down and picks up. Another POV shot shows the screenplay and reveals that it is describing this sequence as it occurs [fig. 1.13]. Heather reads it in voiceover:

> The more she read the more she realised what she had in her hands was nothing more or less than her life itself. That everything she had experienced and thought was bound within these pages. There was no movie. There was only… her… life…


fluttering - like the wings of a wounded bird or... She turns.

IN HER POV - ACROSS THE CHAMBER - past falling water an ruined pillars there is visible - A SCRIPT. Its pages flapping in the hissing wind.

HEATHER CROSSES. Cautiously kneels and picks it up. Checking over her shoulder once, she opens to a page at random.

CLOSE ON THE SCRIPT. HEATHER'S VOICE can be heard READI OS:

HEATHER (OS)
(reading)
The more she read the more she realized what she had in her hands was nothing more or less than her life itself. That everything she had experienced and thought was bound within these pages. There was no movie. There was only... her... life...

Figure 1.13. Heather finds the screenplay that not only narrates her actions but also her inner thoughts.

Heather and Dylan reunite and work together to defeat Freddy, continuing the Hansel and Gretel theme by pushing him into an oven. They escape as Freddy's realm explodes. The camera cuts to Dylan's bedroom and they come tumbling out from under the covers of his bed. The camera dollies in as Heather and Dylan embrace and daylight floods the room. Dylan, reciting from Hansel and Gretel (or possibly *The Wizard of Oz*), says 'the witch is dead'. An insert shot shows the screenplay partially covered by a blanket. Heather picks it up and opens the first page. Another insert shows a dedication from Craven [fig. 1.14]: 'thanks for having the guts to play Nancy one last time.' The camera zooms in as Craven is heard reading the dedication in voiceover. Heather flips through the script, revealing various scenes from earlier in the film. She reaches the last page and the viewer can read the upcoming dialogue [fig. 1.15]. Cut to Heather and Dylan in a two-shot where Dylan promptly speaks what the audience have just read. He asks if the script is a story and if Heather can read it to him. Heather flips back to the start of the script where it is apparent that the last lines are the same as the first [fig. 1.16]. She begins to read and the camera dollies back showing mother and son sitting amongst the mess of the bedroom. The camera dollies out of the bedroom as a

gentle piano melody plays on the score. As the credits begin, the music jarringly changes to the aggressive and jolting main theme. The scene fades to black as the credits continue to roll.

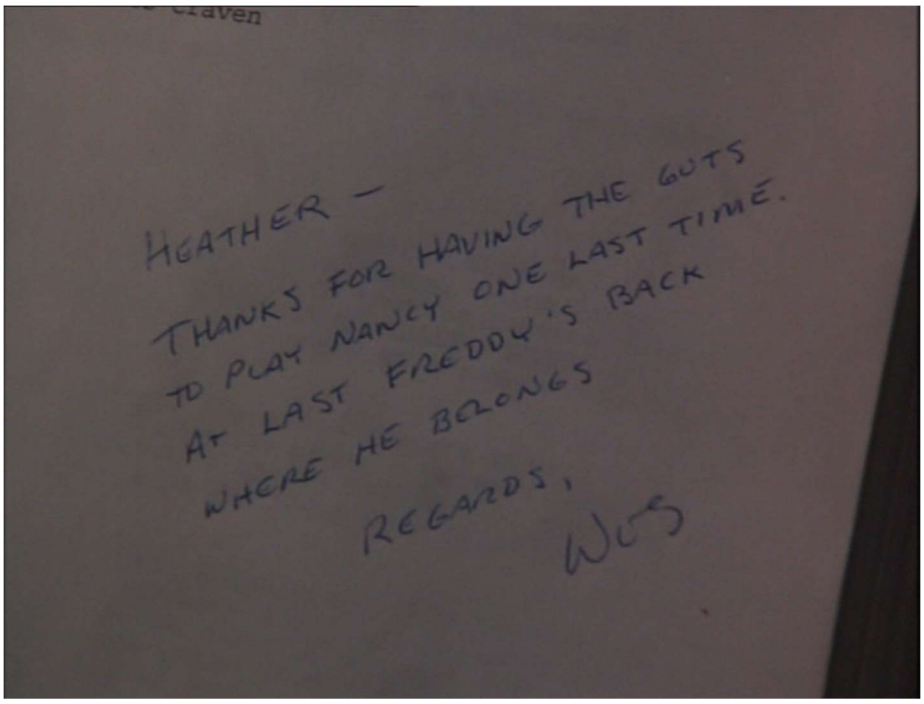


Figure 1.14. Craven's final message to Heather.

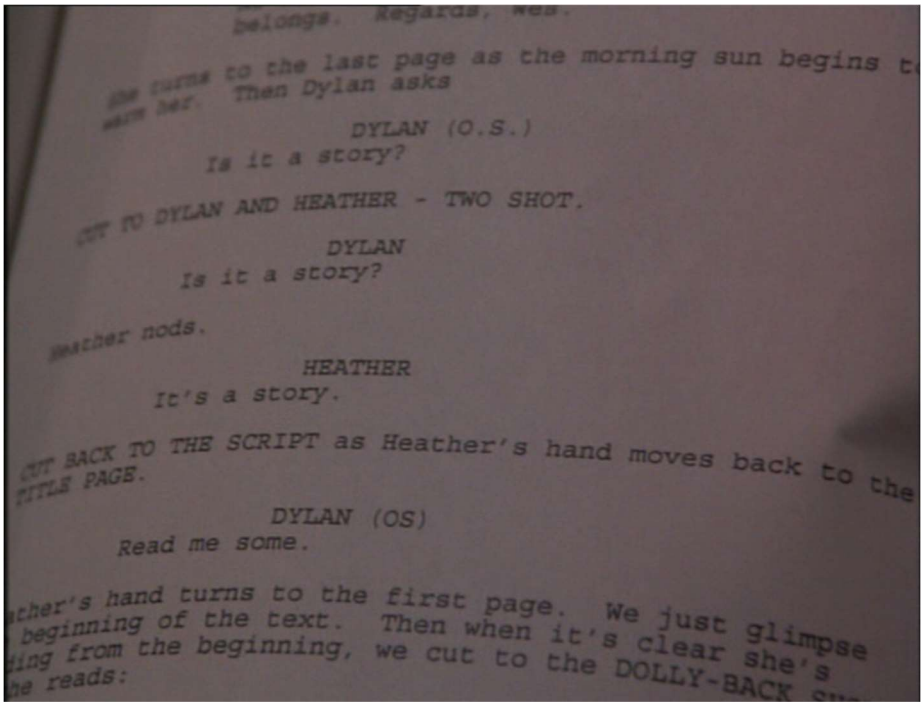
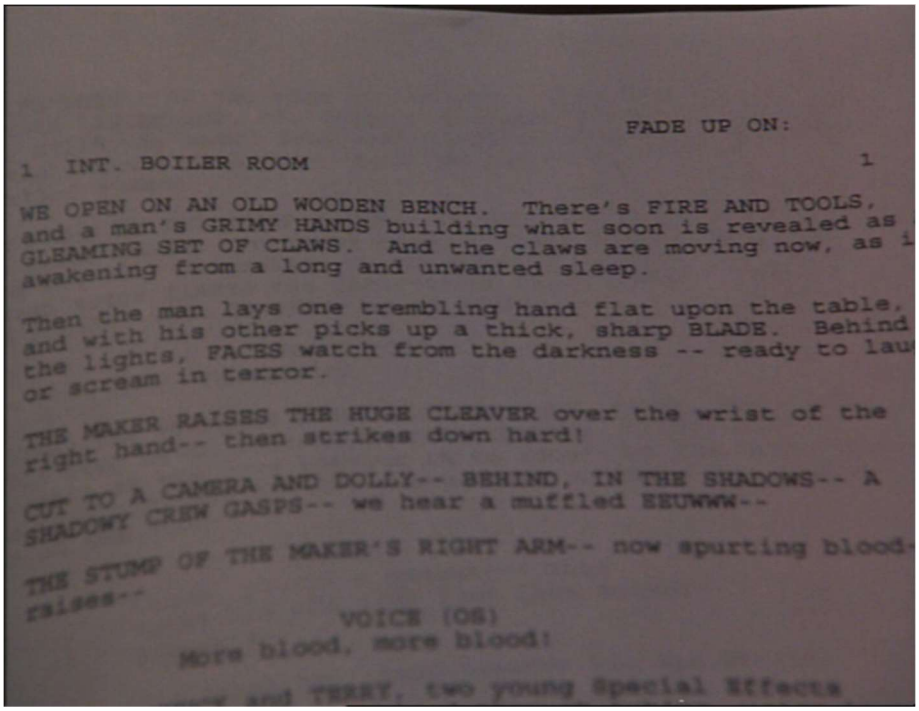


Figure 1.15. The audience can now read, hear, and see the end of the film.



FADE UP ON:

1 INT. BOILER ROOM 1

WE OPEN ON AN OLD WOODEN BENCH. There's FIRE AND TOOLS, and a man's GRIMY HANDS building what soon is revealed as GLEAMING SET OF CLAWS. And the claws are moving now, as i awakening from a long and unwanted sleep.

Then the man lays one trembling hand flat upon the table, and with his other picks up a thick, sharp BLADE. Behind the lights, FACES watch from the darkness -- ready to lau or scream in terror.

THE MAKER RAISES THE HUGE CLEAVER over the wrist of the right hand-- then strikes down hard!

CUT TO A CAMERA AND DOLLY-- BEHIND, IN THE SHADOWS-- A SHADOWY CREW GASPS-- we hear a muffled EEUWWW--

THE STUMP OF THE MAKER'S RIGHT ARM-- now spurting blood- raises--

VOICE (OS)
More blood, more blood!

Figure 1.16. They can also read the beginning, as the narrative appears to restart.

This recursive climax was received coolly by academics. Phillips shrugs that 'in the end Langenkamp's "real life" is too aesthetically similar to the films and the dream, and thus Craven is unable to create enough of a distinction between the three worlds to make the blurring of them jarring.'[47] In Craven's defence, it is perfectly plausible that the breakdown of ontological levels is a desired effect. Perhaps the audience is not supposed to be able to orientate themselves. The intended effect may be not to jar, but to unsettle. This is achieved by making ontological grounding impossible. This is not a new conceit for Craven. Craven's original *Elm Street* film did appear to make clear distinctions between dream and reality, but the climax of that film muddies the division so as to make the previous borders between dreams and waking life retroactively troubled. When Heather reads the script at the end of *New Nightmare* she tellingly realises 'that what she had in her hands was nothing more or less than her life itself'. Her life is supposed to be inseparable from the script. As I previously attributed to Derrida, life is defined and survives through language, but only because

[47] Phillips, *Dark Directions*, 88.

language is the deferral and negation of life. To put it another way, language is the means with which we experience life indirectly.

'Life', in this sense, is not what we generally think of as lived experience *per se*, but represents an unbearable Lacanian Real that cannot be experienced directly. For Derrida, living is the constant evasion of a horrific and unbearable life. Derrida wrote that 'books are always books of *life*'.[48] In *New Nightmare*, scripts are scripts of life. By packaging incomprehensible 'life' into legible narratives (books/scripts) so it becomes liveable. I revisit this idea later in regard to *Adaptation*'s attempt to resist narrative, ultimately leading to a cascade of narrative cliché. It appears we are powerless to halt the progression of the story.

Caetlin Benson-Allott provides a different reading. She argues that 'because there is no ontological distinction between reality, dreams, and fiction, Craven suggests, fiction does not provide catharsis for real world troubles, nor is it an outlet for the dark side of human nature. Rather fiction can be seen as a technology in the Heideggerian sense: a means for enframing the world and recognising truth.'[49] The Heideggerian reading is closer to my proposal of cinematic individuation. For Benson-Allott, the screenplay is a Heideggerian technology that frames the world and unveils some previously unseen truth. Heidegger's mantra concerning technology was that 'the essence of modern technology lies in Enframing. Enframing belongs within the destining of revealing.'[50] In my theory, the film itself is a technical object that mediates our relationship with the world. Whilst technology for Heidegger might reveal the truth of the world, I am less concerned with absolutes. I am looking for connections but not those of any elevated ideal kind. If cinematic individuation is working then the organic being (spectator) does not uncover a transcendental fact, but rather realises their own existence (the potential is found within rather than sought without). The

[48] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 95.
[49] Benson-Allott, 'Wes Craven: Thinking through Horror', 76.
[50] Heidegger, 'Die Frage nach der Technik' ['The Question Concerning Technology', 1954], 25.

Heideggerian technology offers a space of mediation wherein movements of de/reindividuation can happen. This does not infer the discovery of inherent truths as the powers and insight gained from cinematic individuation can be entirely false (which would be much more preferable). *New Nightmare* does not successfully delineate a true reality, a fictional world, and a dreamscape. And so, for Phillips, the film is a failure. What it does achieve is an unpicking of such demarcations. If this successfully transfers to the viewer then this destabilisation of reality can lead to the necessary de-subjectification that occurs prior to the rise of a new subjectivity.

Michael Fuchs describes the ending of *New Nightmare* as a Möbius strip that suggests that there is no difference between our reality and cinematic reality. He notes that 'once all the dust has settled and all the smoke has cleared after reality and fiction have faced off, what still stands tall is the assumedly long-dead author and his script.' The primacy of Craven as author and director is likewise the focus of Pilipp. He describes that at the end 'the story spins into a new beginning. This spiral effect places the focus once more on the storyteller/writer/director as the creator, glorifying the art of storytelling as a wondrous act of (self-)liberation and self-actualization. In fact the writer/director withdraws into his own fiction (hence the metadiegetic title *Wes Craven's New Nightmare*), which grants him infinite possibilities of self-concealment and self-expression.'[51] As Craven does not die in *New Nightmare*, Fuchs is presumably referring to 'The Death of the Author', where Roland Barthes claims that 'the author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*'.[52] Pilipp takes this further by declaring that Craven circumvents his authorial 'death' by seeking refuge within his fiction. In actuality, by reinventing himself as a fictional character, Craven relinquishes all claim to authorial control. He condemns himself to the screenplay (fig. 1.16). As with Freddy, he entraps himself within

[51] Pilipp, 'Creative Incest', 62.
[52] Barthes, 'La mort de l'auteur' ['The Death of the Author', 1967], 145.

language. Whilst this has the effect of protecting and prolonging his life, the side effect is the very negation and deferral of life. He cannot escape his authorial death. He can only put it 'under erasure', and thus make it even more apparent.

Amongst this surrealism is another crystal-image. As Heather reverts to the role (costume and set included) of Nancy Thompson (figs. 1.7, 1.8, and 1.9), she is brought face-to-face with her scream queen youth. Once again, the circuit between past and present is contracted to an indiscernible proximity. Yet another layer is added to this when she encounters the TV playing *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (fig. 1.10). In this situation Heather is enacting her past performance and is placed against an image, within the frame, of her past self enacting the same performance. Not only are actor and character mirrored, but the narratives and running-time are as well (both scenes show the same action, and both occur at the same point in their respective climaxes). As in the chat show scene the crystal-image shows the creation and merging of interior and exterior milieux. Heather makes the psychic decision to become Nancy and accordingly the physical world matches this choice.

This destabilising crystal-image couples with the tension of the horror film set-up to once again set the field for cinematic individuation. However, once again the atmosphere is dispelled by the introduction of a reference too far. The allegories to Hansel and Gretel, and then to the apocalyptic visions of Bosch (see fig. 1.12), overbalance the delicate image. As with the screen-media-Oedipus joke from the chat show scene, Craven presents us with another sub-Freudian joke here. The portal that Heather and Dylan use to access Freddy's lair resembles a fallopian tube. Mother and son must go to bed together in order to return to a pre-natal state within the womb (Freddy's realm of demonic creativity). This is good for an intellectual snigger, but is all rather dry and deathly. Any affective aura is dispelled and the audience is returned back to a position of knowing irony.

Final (Girl)

Referring to metanarrative horror films which include the autopoietic film-within-a-film trope, Fuchs writes that 'untangling the convoluted filmic incest, as Thomas Pynchon may call it, in movies like *New Nightmare* and *Mouth of Madness* [*In the Mouth of Madness* (John Carpenter, 1994)] resembles fighting a losing battle. Indeed, these films not only suggest that there is no distinction between the known and unknown, but also that we simply cannot know the world around us.'[53] Fuchs is doing Pynchon, Craven, and Carpenter a disservice by tossing them all into the same pot. His Pynchon reference comes from *The Crying of Lot 49*, where it describes the 'horrible. Endless, convoluted incest' of buying and selling used cars.[54] A person trades in one lifestyle commodity for another of reasonably similar 'value'. They feel their life is progressing when in fact it remains inert. It is similar to how Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe capitalism as a 'body without organs' of 'zero intensities'.[55] Pynchon's novel deals with the theme of entropy within closed systems. To transpose this model to *New Nightmare* is fairly damming as it seals the film away from the interpretation of the spectator. The film can then only exist as a historical object: a document of its time but not something that can really connect with new audiences.

Given the directors' similar career paths (Craven and Carpenter are often lumped together as slasher pioneers), the proximity of their release dates, and their thematic and narrative resonances, *In the Mouth of Madness* is a useful point of comparison to *New Nightmare*. It involves an insurance agent (Sam Neill) investigating a H. P. Lovecraft/Stephen King-esque horror writer (Jürgen Prochnow). Later in the film the insurer is revealed to be a character in the writer's new novel, his fate at the whim of the author. At

[53] Fuchs, 'Postmodern Horror', 86 – 87.
[54] Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), 8.
[55] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 170.

the end of the film the insurer enters a cinema where a film adaptation of the novel is playing. What he sees onscreen are scenes from the film the audience has been watching. Carpenter's film provides a better example of entropy than Craven's, for whatever action one takes, one cannot escape one's fictional destiny. In *New Nightmare*, having become aware and having accepted one's existence as lines on a page, a character can still enjoy agency, even if this is the illusion of agency. However much authority Heather Langenkamp may be allowed through her various fictional avatars in *New Nightmare*, the film remains closed for the audience. It falls short of Barthes' idea of the 'writerly text', the goal of which 'is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text.'[56] By making its characters (with real life counterparts) active producers of its text, *New Nightmare* denies its audience the same privilege.

Whilst the film might be an eventual failure in terms of cinematic individuation, there is something constructive to be said for this. In his writing on parapraxis (the Freudian slip), Thomas Elsaesser suggests that 'the Freudian term *Fehlleistung* … translates as "failed performance" as well as "performance of failure"'.[57] Thus, *New Nightmare*'s failure to 'perform' the terms of cinematic individuation is also a performance of said failure, and perhaps, is a symptom of the coming turn towards abjection in self-reflexive Hollywood films. The film invites cinematic individuation through its crystal-images but ultimately undermines this potential by engaging in too much 'cinematic incest'. Through this 'failure', *New Nightmare* highlights a desire and a need for cinematic individuation whilst acknowledging that it is incapable of fully achieving it.

New Nightmare is a creative curio and was a minor financial success, but its lasting effect was negligible. *In the Mouth of Madness* (also produced at New Line) flopped, and it was not until Craven's *Scream* (1996) that meta-horror had its first hit. *Scream* dials back the

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[56] Barthes, *S/Z*, 4.
[57] Elsaesser, *German Cinema—Terror and Trauma: Cultural Memory Since 1945*, 8.

ontological questions of *New Nightmare* in favour of imbuing its cast with dramatic irony. The characters are aware of the tropes of horror films, and frequently comment on the 'rules' of their traumatic experience. This approach was used more recently in another successful film: Drew Goddard's *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012), where the archetypes and hackneyed narratives of horror history are exhumed for (mainly) comic effect. This type of metafiction (fairly S.O.P.) has its roots, not in *New Nightmare*, but in an earlier 'slasher' film: *Friday 13th Part VI: Jason Lives* (Tom McLoughlin, 1986). Craven did attempt to return to the themes of *New Nightmare* in *Scream 3*. The film involves a serial killer stalking the set of a film based on the events of the original *Scream*, and even includes a similar scene to the climax of *New Nightmare* where the series' heroine, Sidney (Neve Campbell), is chased around a prop version of her old house. Despite being a box-office hit, *Scream 3* received negative reviews, effectively causing Craven to cease his thematic explorations of the boundary between reality and cinema.

Hollywood, California: 2002

In 2002 America was reeling in the aftermath of 9/11. President George Bush's War on Terror had begun with the invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001. By 2003 a US-led coalition (with the UK, Australia, Poland, and Iraqi Kurds) was at war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq. In Hollywood, the previous year had seen the seeds of juggernaut franchises sown. First instalments released in 2001 included *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Peter Jackson), *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Chris Columbus), *Shrek* (Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson), *Ocean's Eleven* (Stephen Soderburgh), and *The Fast and the Furious* (Rob Cohen). These would be (and still are) consistently lucrative vehicles for New Line (*The Lord of the Rings* [2001 – 2003], $3 billion, and *The Hobbit* [2012 – 2014], $2.932

billion), Warner Bros. (*Harry Potter* [2001 – present], $8.531 billion, and *Ocean's* [2001 – present], $1.386 billion), DreamWorks (*Shrek* [2001 – present], $3.511 billion), and Universal (*The Fast and The Furious* [2001 – present], $3.9 billion). This was the start of an era of blockbuster franchising and cross-media marketing that had not been seen since *Star Wars* (and of course included a new *Star Wars* trilogy of prequels) and obliterated the impact of relatively niche genre series such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *The Naked Gun* (David Zucker and Peter Segal, 1988 – 1994). Studios had aggressively bought up intellectual property and film rights during the 1990s and could now reap the rewards.

Columbia Pictures had suffered a slow start to the 1990s having been sold to Sony by The Coca Cola Company in 1989. Business steadily improved following several mergers with other Sony film and TV properties, to the extent that in 1997 Columbia broke the then-studio record for total annual domestic (US) box-office revenue ($1.256 billion). A year later Columbia merged with TriStar to form Columbia TriStar Pictures. By the end of 2002 they would break their previous 1997 box-office record, posting a total domestic gross of $1.575 billion. This was achieved by the flexing of Columbia's own franchise muscles: *Spider-Man* (Sam Raimi), *Men in Black II* (Barry Sonnenfeld), and *xXx* (Rob Cohen).

In 1997, 20th Century Fox had optioned the film rights to *The New Yorker* staff writer Susan Orlean's non-fiction book *The Orchid Thief* (1998, based on an article that appeared in *The New Yorker* on 3 January 1995). The rights were bought by producer/director Jonathan Demme, who eventually took the project to Columbia who would release it in 2002 as *Adaptation*. In 1999 USA Films released *Being John Malkovich* to critical acclaim and respectable box-office success.[58] In 2000 both director Spike Jonze and screenwriter Charlie Kaufman were nominated for Academy Awards in their respective categories for *Malkovich*.

[58] USA Films was a merger between October Films and Gramercy Pictures which would quickly merge with Good Machine and Universal Focus to become Universal's 'independent' production and distribution company: Focus Features.

Jonze and Kaufman were attached to *Adaptation* before *Malkovich* finished shooting. Hence, in *Adaptation* we see Kaufman writing (or more accurately failing to write) on the set of *Malkovich*.

Adaptation was produced and financed by Propaganda Films, James Schamus' Good Machine, and Intermedia. The former two were both subsidiaries of Universal, whilst the latter was a German tax shelter, devised for the purposes of funding films. Columbia provided domestic distribution. The fractured nature of *Adaptation*'s varied production companies is indicative of contemporary Hollywood. Whilst studios still produce the most expensive blockbusters predominantly in house, this subdivision of production labour allows them to minimise financial risk on projects such as *Adaptation* with which they hope to increase their critical prestige and to garner statuettes come awards season. To an extent, this model was influenced by the successes of New Line and Miramax in the late 1980s and 1990s. Geoff King has termed this major studio riff on the practices of the independents: 'Indiewood'. He suggests that 'from one perspective, they offer an attractive blend of creativity and commerce, a source of some of the more innovative and interesting work produced in close proximity to the commercial mainstream. From another, this is an area of duplicity and compromise, in which the "true" heritage of the independent sector is sold out, betrayed and/or co-opted into an offshoot of Hollywood.'[59] As I have argued, there has never been a truly 'independent' American cinema. I also believe that, following Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'minor literature' (that which uses the traits and tropes of the mainstream in order to pervert and mutate it), it is only possible to challenge and change dominant systems from within.[60] Therefore, I do not tend to view 'Indiewood' as a problem.

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[59] King, *Indiewood, USA: Where Hollywood meets Independent Cinema*, 1.
[60] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Pour une Littérature Mineure* [*Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 1975], 18. Deleuze also refutes the entire idea of a fully closed system (see *Cinema I*, 12, 20). Thus, as the dominant system is open, it is technically possible for anyone to join with it and potentially change it.

Writer's Block

Adaptation, as with *New Nightmare*'s verisimilitude to Heather Langenkamp's actual life, takes its cues from reality. As Charlie Kaufman struggled to adapt a non-fiction book about rare orchids with no discernible plot or conflict, he turned his own failure to write into the narrative foundation of the film. Thus, the film begins with screenwriter Charlie Kaufman (Nicholas Cage) having meetings with various Columbia executives and friends where he describes his desire to write about flowers and evolution in order to avoid turning the story into a convoluted heist or drug film, and how he wants to avoid inventing a love story or killing off characters just for the sake of entertainment. Much of the first part of the film surrounds Charlie's attempts at different approaches, usually including voiceover narration of his various efforts. Eventually Charlie starts writing/narrating himself writing about failing to write the script, usually using self-critical language: 'Kaufman, fat, bald'. Meanwhile, Charlie's identical twin brother Donald (also Nicholas Cage) has moved in with him. Donald is determined to begin a screenwriting career and embarks on a ridiculous, cliché ridden spec script called *The 3*. To Charlie's annoyance, Donald's script progresses amazingly fast, and is adored by everyone who reads it. Charlie's work goes nowhere, and his confidence is further shattered when his friend Amelia (Cara Seymour) rejects his romantic advances.

Despairing, Charlie follows Donald's advice to attend Robert McKee's (Brian Cox) screenplay seminar. There Charlie is berated by McKee for failing to find conflict in real life. Charlie's voiceover narration ceases mid-flow as McKee dictates 'and God help you if you use voiceover in your work, my friends. God help you. That's flaccid, sloppy writing. Any idiot can write a voiceover narration to explain the thoughts of a character.' This narrative thread is intercut with that of Susan Orlean (Meryl Streep), telling the story of Orlean's encounters with the orchid poacher Laroche (Chris Cooper). Charlie and Donald discover that

Orlean has been hiding an affair with Laroche and has developed a drug habit from a substance he synthesises out of the rare ghost orchid.

They tail her to Laroche's home in the Florida Everglades and witness them having sex and doing drugs. Spotting Charlie and realising that they will be exposed, Laroche and Orlean chase the twins into the swamp trying to kill them. Hiding in the swamp, the brothers reconcile their differences. They try to escape in their car, but immediately crash. Donald dies in his brother's arms. Laroche chases Charlie back into the swamp; but before he can shoot Charlie, Laroche is eaten by an alligator. Orlean is arrested, and Charlie returns to LA. The film ends with Charlie making up with Amelia and finishing the script—the final act having broken all of Charlie's rules about not conforming to Hollywood's perversion of truth for the sake of entertainment. The last shot shows time-lapse footage of some flowers whilst the LA traffic moves at varying time-lapse and real time speeds around it.

Compared to *New Nightmare*, *Adaptation* has a relatively similar metafictional and recursive structure. Once again, the film ends with its own beginning, theoretically running on an endless loop as in films such as *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000) or *The Endless* (Justin Benson and Aaron Moorhead, 2017). The melange of cameo performances (Catherine Keener, Spike Jonze, John Malkovich, John Cusack), real people played by actors (Charlie Kaufman, Orlean, Laroche, and McKee), invented characters (Donald Kaufman is entirely fictional yet still is credited as co-writer of *Adaptation*), existing films and books, invented films, actual events, and wildly fictionalised events blurs the line between fiction and reality. But can such dogged adherence to metafiction be a useful and productive tool?

Geoff King takes an ambivalent position. Discussing Jonze and Kaufman's thematically resonant film, *Being John Malkovich*, he suggests that such films 'are seen as establishing particular demands on viewers in return for giving them a sense of belonging to a

particular kind of interpretive community.'[61] There is a puzzle-box pleasure to be had with these films; but whether this goes further than intellectual games (the filmmakers' pleasure of tricking, and the audience's pleasure of being tricked) is questionable. Are we seeing a return of Barthes' 'writerly text'? The filmmakers seem to have too much control for this claim to be accurate. The inclusion of the writer within the text is, despite the scorn Kaufman pours upon himself, an attempt to reaffirm his agency, even if it is the agency of failure. King refers back to literary metafiction, most prominent in the United States during the postmodern literature movement of the 1960s. He proposes that in that context, metafiction responded to specific sociopolitical issues. In our contemporary cultural climate, he questions, 'whether or not a film such as *Adaptation* can be understood in any direct way as a product of a particular larger social-cultural context'.[62] I sympathise with this position. Marshall McLuhan's famous line, 'the medium is the message' is now taken as given by a society that instinctively appraises whether a given communication would be better suited to Snapchat or Twitter, and no eyelids are batted at Stan Lee's indulgent cameos in every Marvel comic book film. We reside in an anaemic state of ironic detachment, refusing to take anything at face value. Spin, 'alternative facts', and conspiracy are each expected and accepted as standard operating procedure.

Although Kaufman is making a point about Hollywood's lack of respect for source material, the action-packed final act of *Adaptation* is mundane compared to meta opening part. It is, after all, designed to resemble various filmmaking clichés. Joshua Landy suggests that Kaufman is challenging our (humanity's) dependence on narrative. He proposes that 'the second part, with its cascade of action, cures us by surfeit of our desire for narrative', and that the film is 'a reaction to the question of why we are so obsessed with narrative in the first

[61] King, *Indiewood*, 31.
[62] King, 55.

place.'[63] This chimes with Agamben's 'primate caught in language' and with Freddy Krueger's entrapment within the narrative of the *Elm Street* franchise.

Linguistic systems are elementary narrative forms, in that there must be some sort of ordered progression (syntagm), a beginning and an end. The answer to the question of why we need narrative is straightforward: according to Russian formalists such as Victor Shklovsky and Mikhail Bakhtin, the world cannot be experienced without the structures of language with which experience is ordered. Humans are wired to seek order in the form of narrative.[64] Place someone before a work of abstract expressionism and they will desperately seek to decipher it (unless they tire and give up). They will form a narrative. Or, as Umberto Eco might say, we reduce the world to a semiotic experience in order to compare it to fictional worlds.[65]

Is this inherently a bad thing? Even radical theories, such as Deleuze and Guattari's 'schizoanalysis', that seek to destroy the structures that govern experience, eventually advocate some kind of new restructuring. Of course, Kaufman is really attacking cultural behemoths such as Hollywood, which insist that everything conforms to the same reductive narrative templates that serve to reinforce cultural hegemony.

Julie Levinson offers a more positive perspective. She draws on Linda Hutcheon's writings on metafiction (see 'Introduction') to propose that narratives such as *Adaptation* are inherently more honest due to their artificiality 'because the text goes out of its way to remind us that it is only a text, we end up finding it more candid than a mimetic text in its acknowledgement of its constructed status.'[66] The over-the-top ending is triggered by

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[63] Landy, 'Still Life in a Narrative Age: Charlie Kaufman's Adaptation', 510, 511.
[64] This claim has its roots in the work of the Russian formalists. In particular, Viktor Shklovsky's *O teorii prozy* [*Theory of Prose*, 1925], trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, Ill.: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), and Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Tex., and London: University of Texas Press, 1981).
[65] Eco, *Lector in Fabula*.
[66] Levinson, '*Adaptation*, Metafiction, Self-creation', 160.

Kaufman's encounter with screenwriting guru Robert McKee, which leads to Kaufman giving in to convention and formulating the most generic third-act possible. This ending is then a sardonic spotlight on the arbitrary nature of narrative, and particularly Hollywood narrative, rules. This has the side-effect of cheapening the first part of the film. It may be less stereotypical than the end of the film, but it is actively telling us that it is just as disposable. Honest maybe, but still just another artificial narrative.

Levinson claims that 'as a self-creating narrative, the film requires active spectatorial engagement to discern the direction of its textual signposts.'[67] I find that the nature of self-creation actually negates spectatorial engagement. By letting the audience in on its construction, *Adaptation* also seals itself off. Hutcheon called metafiction 'narcissistic narratives' in that they are narratives of self-realisation, of coming into being. However, in order to focus on their own existence, they necessarily become narcissistic in the more colloquial sense of solipsism. Perhaps the author most representative of the American postmodern period, Thomas Pynchon, deployed metafiction and ironic jokes, but many of his novels opened out into something more sincere at their conclusion. Something more akin to the modernist project that seeks to discover an ultimate truth through experimental art.

It is telling that in *Adaptation* Kaufman announces, 'I'm insane. I'm ouroboros.' Not only does the *ouroboros* show the film's self-awareness as both a system closed to exterior forces, and which is ostensibly infinite, it also corresponds to Carl Jung's work on this old alchemical symbol. Jung tells of visions experienced by the Greek alchemist Zosimos of Panopolis:

> In Zosimos this circular thinking appears in the sacrificial priest's identity with his victim and in the remarkable idea that the homunculus into whom Ion is changed devours himself. He spews forth his own flesh and rends himself with his own teeth. The homunculus therefore stands for the uroboros [sic], which devours itself and gives birth to itself (as though spewing itself forth). Since the homunculus represents the transformation of Ion, it follows that Ion,

[67] Levinson, 179.

> the uroboros, and the sacrifice are essentially the same. They are three different aspects of the same principle.[68]

If this template is mapped onto *Adaptation*, then I propose that Charlie is the homunculus ('fat, bald'), the script (both within and without the film) is the *ouroboros*, and Donald is the sacrifice (for he must die for the script to be finished and so that the film may end). Under this schema, the writer, his avatar, his fictional twin, his script, and the fictional script become facets of the 'same principle'. This reading is supported by having Nicholas Cage play both Charlie and Donald, making them physically identical. It could be proposed that this forms another crystal-image. In that the distinction between what is apparently actual and what is virtual becomes indiscernible. If it does, then it is a crystal-image secured in a display cabinet. The film is too much an insular construction to allow the audience to touch it

Beyond Metafiction

If *Adaptation* is to shake us out of our ironic, apathetic stupor, and to effect cinematic individuation, it will not do so through its explicitly metafictional elements. These give the impression of opening the film up for the viewer, but this is a mirage. Instead they reaffirm the film as purely belonging to the writer, the filmmakers, and the Hollywood system. All is not lost. Behind the flashes of narrative tour-de-force lie some quieter, unassuming moments that have potential for cinematic individuation. I will suggest two such instances and provide a close reading of each. The first occurs relatively early in the film when Charlie and Amelia go on a date. The second, 'The Flowers and the Traffic', is at the very end of the film.

[68] Jung, 'Die Visionen des Zosimos' [The Visions of Zosimos, 1954], 84.

The Date

Charlie is driving at night with Amelia sitting in the passenger seat. Beck's 'Dead Melodies' (1998) plays quietly on the car stereo. From their conversation it is deducible that they have been at a Sibelius concert. They disagree on the ending of the *Violin Concerto in D Minor* (1905), Amelia having found it 'passionate' and Charlie having found it 'weird'. They arrive at Amelia's house. She does not leave the car but instead asks Charlie 'what are you up to now then?' Charlie is framed in a medium close-up, over-the-shoulder shot. He mumbles something about needing to get to bed as his eyes dart around the car. Amelia says goodnight and the camera cuts to a reverse angle. She gives a forced grin and then bites her lip whilst closing her eyes and inhaling deeply. Having composed herself, she gives a more natural smile as the camera slightly zooms in on her. The camera cuts back to the previous angle of Charlie. He stares, open mouthed in silence for a beat. He looks away and says that he would stay out were it not for his script struggles. He does not look at Amelia whilst he gives this excuse and, warming to this line of thought, starts to outline his issues with adapting *The Orchid Thief*. During these ramblings the camera cuts back to the reverse angle on Amelia. She is staring directly at Charlie, listening intently. The camera cuts back to Charlie who circles back to his need to go home and get a good night's sleep so he can make a fresh start in the morning. The camera cuts back to Amelia who smiles but looks disappointed. 'Otherwise I'd stay out!' Charlie insists, finally looking at Amelia. Charlie now looks excited and happy and makes eye contact. He invites Amelia to an orchid show in Santa Barbara the following weekend. The camera cuts to Amelia as she frowns and shakily tells him 'I don't think I can make it next weekend…' The camera cuts to Charlie, suddenly crestfallen. Amelia abruptly exits the vehicle. She says goodnight offscreen, and her footsteps can be heard rapidly walking away. The camera remains focused on Charlie, his expression frozen [fig.

1.17]. His voiceover kicks in: 'Why didn't I go in? I'm such a chicken … I should have kissed her. I've blown it.' The camera cuts to an insert of Amelia going through her front door in long shot. There is a slight iris effect, presumably caused by the car window, out of focus in the foreground.

Figure 1.17. Charlie stares open mouthed, his expression frozen whilst his internal monologue rages within.

Charlie's internal monologue continues over this shot: 'I should just go and knock on her door right now and kiss her. It would be romantic. Something we could someday tell our kids.' The camera cuts back to Charlie, still staring, mouth agape. 'I'm gonna do that right now.' Following this statement of intent, the camera cuts to a medium close-up, rotated ninety-degrees from the previous shot, of Charlie. He releases the handbrake and pulls away from the side of the road. End of scene.

On a structural level, Amelia is a key character. Given that Charlie appears to be facing what Raymond Bellour termed 'symbolic blockage' in the form of his very real writer's block, classical narrative structure would dictate that he 'gets the girl' once he has resolved the script.[69] This expected order of resolutions is reversed at the end of the film. Charlie resolves his issues with Amelia and they remain friends but crucially nothing more,

[69] See Bellour, 'Symbolic Blockage (On North by Northwest)'.

which allows him to complete the script. This suggests that Amelia is the neurotic blockage that must be cleared, and that the script is Charlie's ultimate object of desire. There is a certain solipsism to this structure, and it is telling that Charlie's only sexual encounters are onanistic.[70]

This is reflected in the scene through Charlie's nervous attempts to excuse himself from a potentially erotic encounter with Amelia. His eyes are downcast, and they dart around. When he stumbles upon a plausible excuse (he blames the script), and a suitable deferral (a flower show next week), he suddenly seems energised and looks directly at Amelia. Charlie appears to gain satisfaction from these acts of deferral. He enjoys this relationship so long that it remains ever on the cusp of becoming actualised. This is why the script supersedes Amelia as the object of his desire (and why he would rather 'sleep on' the script than sleep with Amelia). It allows for endless new frustrations and withholds its climax *ad infinitum*. Hence when Amelia does not conform to Charlie's requirements of perpetual delay, he is frozen in shock [see fig. 1.17]. The only way he can unlock himself physically at this point is to conjure up an internal romantic fantasy (and narration for a screenplay) so that he might frustrate it by simply driving away.

Whilst this may sound childishly oedipal, there is potential within this scene for cinematic individuation. When individuated beings enter into social individuation with each other they subsequently and constantly move on to other social individuations, or into wider assemblages of social individuation. You have a conversation with me at dinner, we briefly ask the waiter some questions, another member of our party turns up late, you leave the table to use the bathroom and call your partner, you say goodbye and order a taxi, you chat to your driver on the way home, and once home, you rant about your disappointing meal with me on social media. All of these encounters mark your movement in and out of individuations with

[70] Lucas Hilderbrand writes about masturbation as the primary expression of desire in *Adaptation* in his article 'Adaptation', in *Film Quarterly*, vol. 58, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 36 – 43.

friends, strangers, electronic devices, media platforms, and online avatars over the space of a few hours. On his own disappointing date, Charlie is unconsciously attempting to endlessly stretch out his and Amelia's social individuation. If he can successfully defer the completion of the process, then this individuation can always remain imminent. The effect of this, in this scene, is the inadvertent creation of a crystal-image. Charlie carries with him throughout the film several doubles: his fictional identical twin Donald, and the real-life Kaufman. This is coupled in the scene by the collapse of past, present, and future. The camera watches as Amelia leaves the car and enters her house (the past receding) and Charlie reflects on this past with his shocked expression (the present frozen). Meanwhile, his internal thoughts map out a myriad of potential future actions (the future is imminent and in flux). Thus, past, present, and future are all indiscernible within the image of Charlie watching Amelia walk away. We see Charlie's present, we hear his future, and we remember (from the previous shot), his past.

This collapse of time, virtuality, and actuality allows the viewer to experience transference of Charlie and Amelia's state of deferred social individuation. The crystal-image is inherently disarming and makes the viewer vulnerable to the effects of the film. Yet at the same time, the viewer becomes aware that the potential futures that Charlie attends to are equivalent to the potential narrative directions of the film (not to mention the metafictions contained within the film), and therefore correspond to the viewer's potential experiences of watching the film. In this moment, the viewer realises that their immediate destiny is indiscernible from that of the narratives. To be aware of this status is to experience an anxiety of being—Heidegger describes our experience of the present as being measured by our evaluation of future outcomes or causalities.[71] Awareness of narrative's operation is a self-awareness of one's own fluctuating self, and the uncertainty of causality. If we cannot

[71] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* [*Being and Time*, 1927].

see the steps leading from the present to the (imaginary) future, then the future is uncertain, and we cannot clearly see the present. Like a climber whose foot slips on a wet rock, the viewer momentarily feels a sense of panicked instability, an abject effect of realising that you are not whole and are simultaneously multitudinal: excessive. Moving through this abjection leads to cinematic individuation of sorts. Unfortunately, like *New Nightmare's* chat show crystal-image, *Adaptation* does not have the courage to stay with this moment. Instead, it switches immediately back to the aridity of metafiction, and the audience returns to their senses. Unlike anything in *New Nightmare*, this is a genuinely touching scene. It provokes an emotional reaction that momentarily overrides rationality. It is the first time we manage to feel something for Kaufman (or anyone).

The Flowers and the Traffic

Charlie has again driven off from an encounter with Amelia, but this time he is filled with hope, and believes he can finish the script. The camera pans to follow his car as it joins the LA traffic [fig. 1.18]. The Turtles' 'Happy Together' (1967) starts playing on the score as Charlie's car disappears into the horizon. The camera slowly moves from deep to shallow focus to reveal dancing flowers that have emerged in the foreground (an effect permitted by time-lapse photography). The time-lapse increases in speed as the traffic also slips into fast motion [fig. 1.19]. Night falls, and the shallow focus causes the street lights to become abstract floating orbs [fig. 1.20]. Some of the flowers now open as day breaks and sunshine floods the screen. The pace increases so that night and day are passing by the second, and the flowers open and close accordingly, in a rhythmic clapping motion. As the song ends, the time-lapse slows enough for it to be consistently daytime, and for the flowers to lie open to the light. The screen cuts to black and the credits roll.

Figure 1.18. Charlie drives away as the film ends with this view of a busy LA street.

Figure 1.19. The focal length changes as time-lapse filmed daisies fill the foreground.

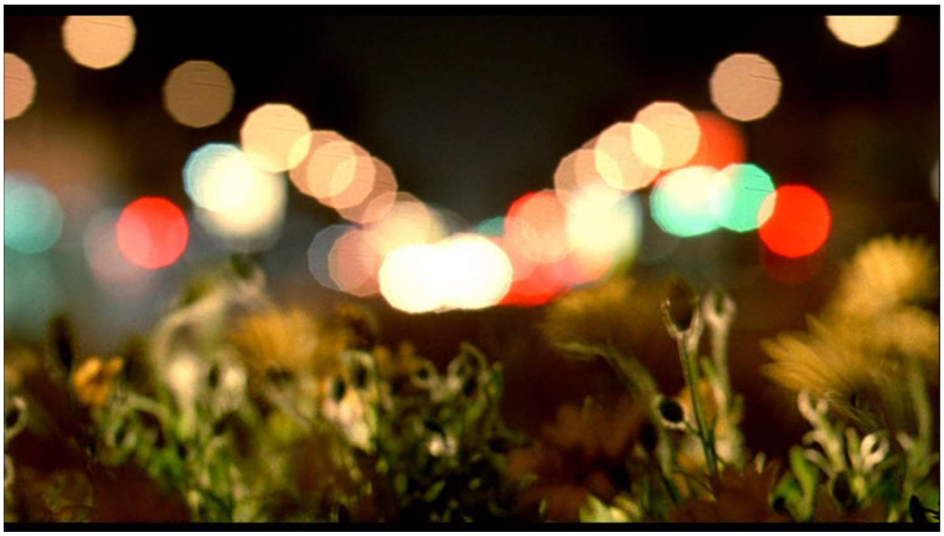

Figure 1.20. As the traffic also becomes time-lapsed, so does day turn to night. The shallow depth of field turns the street lights into floating orbs of colour.

Such an impressionistic ending comes as a surprise considering what has preceded it. *Adaptation* may be clever with its intricate metafictional demonstrations, but it is also relatively easy to untangle, holds the hand of its audience, and is even quite plodding as all the pieces of the jigsaw thud into place. John MacDowell describes this ending as 'an extraordinarily balanced rhetorical combination of an ironic detachment from, and a sincere engagement with, its "happy ending". In other words, we are never allowed to forget the *potential* for ironic appreciation yet are encouraged to be genuinely moved nonetheless.'[72] MacDowell's dichotomy of 'ironic detachment' and 'sincere engagement' matches the terms of dual movement which I have set out for cinematic individuation.

I propose that this scene works in spite of the narrative events it punctuates (although there are key thematic resonances). As MacDowell continues, 'the song, flowers and "time-lapse" presentation are allowed to seem as if they have to some extent escaped Charlie's film within a film'.[73] 'Happy Together' does occur several times in the film. Donald proposes it for his terrible thriller *The 3* as an ironic counterpoint to his story of a serial killer with split personality disorder, and Charlie sings it with Donald as the latter dies in his arms. I assume that most readers know the song. It is one of the most inanely good-natured pieces of pop music ever written, both lyrically and musically. It does, however, end on a Picardy third (when a piece of music ends on a major chord instead of an expected minor chord): generally considered an undermining of a natural resolution. I propose that within its profilmic context this has a predominantly ironic and distancing effect upon the viewer. Whatever 'happiness' is here, it feels off; an insincere performance.

The time-lapse photography allows for two distinct visual rhythms: the daisies and the traffic [see fig. 1.19]. When the rhythm of 'Happy Together' is also included, there are three separate visual time signatures. As night falls, and the focus length creates the impressionistic

[72] MacDowell, 'Notes on Quirky', 12.
[73] MacDowell, 12.

orbs out of street lights, our faculties of interpretation are stimulated [see fig. 1.20]. No longer does the picture objectively resemble the identifiable street scene from figure 1.18. The viewer must work, should they wish to, in order to create meaning out of this new image. There is an individuation between spectator and film, at least on this visual level. As the shot continues, the rhythm of the traffic, the flowers, and the song all cohere. It is at this point that cinematic individuation occurs. The viewer is alienated by the music, critically stimulated by the provocative image, and affectively embraced by the convergence of rhythms (so long as they tune into that rhythm too).

The sequence contains within it the eventual individuation between organic beings (flowers), and technical objects (cars and lights), orchestrated by an assemblage of technical and organic beings (the song performed by The Turtles). This sequence is, as a whole, a technical assemblage that individuates with the organic being that is the viewer. How does this proceed to change our connection to the world? How does this carry a sociopolitical charge?

King believes that *Adaptation*'s potential political value is muted:

> It is a much less politically radical film, in any explicit sense, than *Tout va bien* [Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, 1972]. It might be argued that this is a function of its location in the Indiewood zone, close to the studio system, rather than fully independent. That such allocation might set limits on what is recognized as 'political' content seems highly likely.… The deconstruction, challenging or highly ambiguous employment of dominant conventions can be understood as 'political' in a broader sense, however, if such conventions are understood—as they often are—as significant components of the dominant ideological formulations of the cultures in which they are found.[74]

As previously stated, the 'Indiewood zone' that King delineates, whilst in the shadow of the studios, has a greater political potential regarding Hollywood than, for example, the films of Godard and Gorin's radical Dziga Vertov Group. The historical context and production style

[74] King, *Indiewood*, 62.

of the Dziga Vertov Group's films makes the comparison to 'Indiewood' unworkably complex and, this notwithstanding, it seems impossibly demanding to expect films by Jonze and Kaufman to provoke wholesale changes in Hollywood. Peter Marks raises a notion that 'if innovation is crushed routinely in Hollywood then films such as Kaufman's would never be made there.'[75] It is precisely the 'limits' set by hegemonic groups that are needed in order to have something to push against. When these limits are drawn, as I have argued, they create zones of exclusion. These zones are inherently abject spaces. Despite this, their deterritorialised nature allows for positive reindividuations: of identity, subjectivity, and forms of representation. I fundamentally agree with King's (still hesitant) proposal that challenging ideological formations is a political act. The closest that *Adaptation* comes to this is by laying bare how mainstream film narratives are constructed by institutions such as Hollywood (*Adaptation* is no different), and how cultural narratives are generated by the human cognitive need to build narratives in order to understand politics and life. Thus, any political impact is not a radical change in culture or the film industry. Rather, it occurs on an individual level, effecting or training the spectator's viewing habits and intellectual engagement with cinema.

The sociopolitical potential of this final scene can best be approached by thinking about time. Landy diagnoses two distinct experiences of time. He suggests that 'one cannot tell the story of the flower because stories belong to human time, and flowers have their being outside of that time.'[76] It must be said that we would not be able to understand the concept of 'flower' if we were not able to make it legible as a sign by placing into our narrative understanding of our surroundings—by putting it *into* time. The final sequence displays four distinct representations of time: the song, the traffic, the day-night cycle of the earth, and the opening and closing of the flowers. Of these, the third has a direct effect on the second and

[75] Marks, 'Adaptation from Charles Darwin to Charlie Kaufman', 39.
[76] Landy, 'Still Life in a Narrative Age', 500.

fourth: the working day and the photosynthetic process. Only the song is arguably a purely human construction of time. It is wrong to say that the traffic, the flower, and the sun are outside of narrative time, objectively they may be, but they cannot be experienced without setting them to narrative time. There is the story of the flowers opening for the sun yet closing for the moon, and there is the story of the breaking of the day and the falling of the night. Any invocation of time is also an invocation of narrative.

Whilst these four time signatures may relate to each other, and are compatible to human time, they are inconsistent in speed and rhythm. What the final sequence achieves is to show this clash in one instant, and then to resolve it in another. The coherence of the four temporal orders is admittedly achieved through special effects and image manipulation. What this demonstrates, however, is film's ability as a technical object to reconcile seemingly disparate elements to each other. It is a conductor of relationships within this particular techno-organic assemblage. The viewer is ultimately the one to complete the jigsaw of temporalities but cannot do so without the assistance of the 'tool' (the film and the technical elements that it comprises), and the mediated space (between viewer and screen) offered by the viewing experience. In this sense, the end of *Adaptation* reconnects us to the world, or at least a particular image of the world. The audience comes to understand how our relationship with biological phenomena such as plant life and the solar-lunar cycle is mediated through our experience of the city and technologies such as cars. Thus, our social-political and socio-biopolitical relationship with the world is framed through individuations with cultural-temporal artefacts. As with Craven and Derrida's language that allows us to continually defer, and thus experience (as the Lacanian imaginary order), the world, these artefacts (or technologies, in a Heideggerian sense) provide a mediated space for us to participate in a world. In this case through cinema via cinematic individuation.

William Brown proposes that all matter has both a life and a tempo. He writes that 'each temporality, tempo, or Chronos, is entangled with the other tempos in the universe, and it is from this entanglement that … consciousness emerges.'[77] In the encounter between the viewer and a film, this 'consciousness' takes the form of a third temporality. Brown continues, 'the temporality of the film is always producing a new, emergent "temporality" when put into conjunction with (the temporality of) the spectator'.[78] This new hybrid temporality is the experience of time within the mediational field wherein the film is experienced. It is a technologically assisted tempo that brings the spectator away from machinic rhythm (clockwork), and towards biological and aesthetic tempos (arrhythmic and polyrhythmic). Daniel Yacavone proposes that the rhythms produced in cinema provide a space wherein the audience might 'join with the affective rhythms of human actions and naturally occurring events, our sensory awareness of which opens up other cognitive, imaginative, and emotional spaces than those we may regularly inhabit.'[79] Indeed, for Yacavone, it is precisely this experience of contrasting and complementary temporalities which accounts for sensorial engagement between a film and its viewers.[80]

When outlining his proposed 'theatre of cruelty'—a disruptive and provocative style of theatrical representation—Antonin Artaud described a show that would be 'unafraid of exploring the limits of our nervous sensibility, use rhythm, sound, words, resounding with song, whose nature and startling combinations are part of an unrevealed technique.'[81] The closing sequence of *Adaptation* attempts a sensory *gestalt* with its multi-temporal display. We might call this a kind of 'cinema of cruelty'; not that which is sadistic, but that which

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[77] Brown, *Supercinema: Film-Philosophy for the Digital Age*, 81.
[78] Brown, 100.
[79] Yacavone, *Film Worlds: A Philosophical Aesthetics of Cinema*, 207.
[80] Giorgio Agamben proposes that art becomes accessible to a person only once they have accessed 'authentic temporality' and thus gain 'poetic status'. *The Man without Content*, 101.
[81] Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son Double* [*The Theatre and its Double*, 1938], 66 – 67.

seeks to provoke an original sensation by losing traditional forms of representation whilst honouring new, or neglected, ones.

Meta-reflections

To me, these films have come to represent the bravado of Hollywood during the neo-liberal Clinton regime. The rapidly increasing profits led to inflated, yet low-risk, production budgets. The upstart 'indie' studios were engulfed by the whales like Disney and Warner Bros. who were setting up their dynasties for the coming century. Whilst they may use metafiction to gently poke fun at Hollywood's output and at the brittle egos of actors and writers, they are still very much products of Hollywood, and are not aiming to disrupt or assault the status quo. Really, this kind of metafiction demonstrates an industry that is so comfortable and confident in its position that it welcomes the 'comedy roast' treatment. Hollywood is powerful enough to afford itself a sense of humour—so long as audiences keep emptying their pockets they can laugh as much as they want.

Now, as I bring this chapter to its conclusion, I find myself surprisingly siding with J. D. Connor's dismissal of Hollywood-set narratives due to their allegorical content being too explicit (see 'Introduction'). The case studies of the following chapters show that I do not support this position fully, but in the case of heavily metafictional narratives, I concur. *New Nightmare* and *Adaptation* go to great lengths to lift the curtain and to show their audiences the ropes and pulleys behind the fiction. Linda Hutcheon thinks that such narrative manoeuvres are honest in their dishonesty, but they also cement their fictional status. 'None of this is true because this is how it is constructed', seems to be the argument. By superficially troubling the ontological barrier between the screen and life, the end result is to seal the onscreen world away from reality. The opportunities for cinematic individuation are

lessened as the metafiction resists viewer participation. Much of the thinking and interpretation is being done for the viewer. It is Barthes' 'readerly text' in that the reader/viewer can simply sit back and passively enjoy the neat intricacy of the magic trick on display.

The epigraph to this chapter invokes David Foster Wallace's thoughts on metafiction. He terms the sort of metafictional devices deployed by the likes of Craven and Kaufman as S.O.P. (standard operating procedure) metafiction. He defines this in his (metafictional) short story *Octet* as 'the tired old "hey-look-at-me-looking-at-youlooking-at-me" agenda of tired old S.O.P metafiction'.[82] In this sense, the narrative pyrotechnics in *New Nightmare* and *Adaptation* are really adhering to quite old and established structural forms of representation. In fact, it would appear an anomaly for Hollywood metafiction and self-reflexivity to not have some referent in cinematic history, or from art history (potentially reaching back centuries). As noted in Christian Metz's *Impersonal Enunciation*, reflexive strategies are old but countless, and even his comprehensive taxonomy only presents a selection reflexive 'enunciations'. So, whilst originality might be difficult to achieve, an original configuration of reflexive devices is more attainable. The moments of potential cinematic individuation that I diagnosed in these films come not from the overarching metafictional narrative structures, but from the fleeting and more self-contained 'enunciations' of crystal-images and *Adaptation*'s final 'movement' of time signatures.

This may be due, in part, to the incompatibility of Brechtian alienation (devised for the theatre) with cinema. Stephen Heath reports that 'in Hollywood he [Brecht] comes to regard cinema as inevitably regressive (identificational) in so far as it cuts off the spectator from production, from performance: "the public no longer has any opportunity to modify the actor's performance it [sic] is confronted not with a production but with the result of a

[82] Wallace, 'Octet', 130.

production, produced in its absence.'[83] Brecht presumably saw a clear difference between a stage performance that is produced anew each night within the same space as its audience, and a film that ostensibly remains the same even as its audience changes. Whilst I concede that this will lead to modulations in performance and spectatorship in the theatre, if a film is experienced in a mediational field that lies between spectator and screen, then the viewer does not see the film as a fixed production. In fact, the spectator is always essential in the exhibition of a film, if not its production. It is worth noting that Angelous Koutsourakis' revisionist study of the intersection between Brecht and film theory advises caution regarding the treatment of Brechtian concepts by Heath and other *Screen* theorists in the 1970s. Koutsourakis argues that not only did this treatment privilege a reductive view of Brecht solely applying to disruptive counter-cinema, but it also negated 'the Brechtian *Lehrstück* [teaching play/theatre of discovery], a form of pedagogical theatre aiming to close the gap between actors and audience'.[84]

Yacavone describes reflexivity as 'not only context- but also response-dependent, since it is only actualized, like a current running through a completed electrical circuit.'[85] The self-reflexive film can contain all the potential for spectatorial interaction, but only actualises when played to a willing viewer. The actors' performances cannot be altered, but the way in which they are received and processed is always mutable. More broadly, rather than embracing the *Lehrstück*, self-reflexive cinema does tend to correspond to Dana Polan's claim that, for Brecht, 'political art defamiliarises the world. But it does so by playing off our connections to that world.'[86] This is the basic starting block for metafictional production, but its ultimate failure is to make defamiliarisation familiar. In so doing, metafiction scuppers itself.

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[83] Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, 9.
[84] Koutsourakis, 'Introduction', *Rethinking Brechtian Film Theory and Cinema*.
[85] Yacavone, *Film Worlds*, 136.
[86] Polan, 'Brecht and the politics of self-reflexive cinema'.

Chapter 2 – Man is Sick: Death, Music, and Will to Power in *Ivansxtc*

He was looking for his earlier, accustomed fear of death, but he couldn't find it. 'Where was death? What death?' There was no fear whatsoever, because there was no death. Instead of death there was light. – Leo Tolstoy[1]

Last night I had this incredible pain. The pain was so strong that I took every pill in the goddamn house ... the pain wouldn't go away. I tried to find an image, one worthwhile image that would get me through it. And all I could find was shit. I couldn't find an image worth one goddamn thing. – Ivan Beckman (*Ivansxtc*)

you will the eternal recurrence of war and peace – Friedrich Nietzsche[2]

Why do you think eroticism is so prevalent today in our literature, our theatrical shows, and elsewhere? It is a symptom of the emotional sickness of our time. But this preoccupation with the erotic would not become obsessive if Eros were healthy, that is, if it were kept within human proportions. But Eros is sick; man is uneasy, something is bothering him. – Michelangelo Antonioni[3]

Introduction

In this chapter I delve more deeply into the aesthetic conditions which I deem necessary for cinematic individuation: the simultaneous activation of corporeal affection with cognitive distanciation. To illustrate these, I have chosen Bernard Rose's film *Ivansxtc* (2000) as my case study. *Ivansxtc*, whilst not an explicitly metafictional film such as *New Nightmare* or *Adaptation*, contains a proliferation of extra-textual elements. Most overtly, its status as an adaptation of Leo Tolstoy's 1886 novella *Smert' Ivána Ilyichá* [*The Death of Ivan Ilyich*], immediately places it within a wider (literary) framework.[4] Whilst *Ivansxtc* does not encompass mise-en-abyme films, its Hollywood setting populated with industry figures (agents, producers, directors, actors) suggests that its reflection of the film industry would

[1] Tolstoy, 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich', 217.
[2] Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 162.
[3] Antonioni, '*L'avventura:* Cannes Statement'.
[4] Tolstoy's novella also served as inspiration for Akira Kurosawa's *Ikiru* (1952).

thereby reasonably include a reflection of its own filmic status.[5] *Ivansxtc*'s striking score, particularly the repeated use of excerpts from Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde* [*Tristan and Isolde*, 1865], can be viewed as a further textual 'conversation' with a European artistic canon. Rose's foregrounding of heavyweight figures of nineteenth-century European literature and music is emblematic of his self-positioning as a Hollywood 'outsider'. This also demonstrates a trope within the work of several of the filmmakers discussed in this thesis: the influence of European 'high' art in films made in, and about, Hollywood (see my analyses of films by Sofia Coppola and Terrence Malick in Chapter 4). In a sense, this corresponds to a form of intellectual, and auteurist, globalism. The turn, in this chapter and beyond, to romantic (both period and style) art and philosophy, is a precursor to a kind of neo-romanticism I diagnose in contemporary culture (see Chapter 4). Neo-romanticism, as I propose in the Conclusion, contains within it an ideological challenge to the anti-rational discourse of current right-wing politics and the overly rational discourse of the left.

Although I will address the relationship between the film and its source novella, the musical selections are also one of the main areas of focus for this chapter. In Chapter 1, I demonstrated how a synthesis between sound and image in the final moments of *Adaptation* provoked several affects. As this dissertation progresses, such moments will frequently be presented as activating cinematic individuation. In this chapter, I establish an aesthetic framework for such occurrences using theories taken from Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche and which correspond with Gilbert Simondon's proposed idea of 'aesthetic thinking'—an individuation that occurs at the intersection of religious and technological thought. I will then apply these to three of *Ivansxtc*'s most striking audio-visual combinations.

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[5] In this sense, *Ivansxtc* is comparable to those films by Jean-Luc Godard that were set in and around film sets: *Le Mépris* (1963) and *Passion* (1982). Godard's films were both a criticism of the film industry and a self-evaluation of his own process (often presented as artistic failure).

By first outlining the historical and industrial contexts from which *Ivansxtc* emerged, I demonstrate its technological significance. Alongside its striking audio-visual style, the film is notable for being the first entirely shot on high-definition digital video. An account of the ontological questions that digital cinema invokes is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I do see this as a part of an epochal moment in the development of cinema as a technical *object*, which has implications for cinema as a technical *being*. In Simondon's usage *techne*, or technical thought, is one of four modes or forms of thinking: magical, religious, technical, and aesthetic. Magical thought is the predominant social and cultural principle prior to religion and technology. 'Magical' practices are not chaotic and involve strict ordering and coding systems that offer an (arbitrary) connection between a person and the world. But, as this connection is always mutable, it remains un-concretised. The magical phase detaches into two forms: 'ground powers'—geological/environmental features which constitute the natural world—and 'key points': engineered features which structure this landscape. A river is a ground power; a bridge is a key point.

These two forms lead to two new phases of thought: religious and technical. It is religious thought that sees god in nature—e.g. the idea that mounts Olympus and Fuji are domains of deities. Cinema might be posited as a technical key point that structures our experience of the religious ground powers.[6] But it also invokes magical and religious thinking whenever it deals in symbolism, metaphor, or transcendental depictions of nature. What cinema actually reveals is how all these phases and modes interplay with each other. There is not really a difference between the magical and religious phases. Rather, it is our thinking, or perspective, that changes. When an artform, such as cinema, allows us to realise this, we can say that it has achieved Simondon's ultimate goal: aesthetic thinking.

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[6] Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* [*On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 1958]. See Chapter 4 for a more in-depth discussion of Simondon's modes.

In performing a brief comparative reading between the film and Tolstoy's original novella, I extrapolate that Rose is attempting to attach to a European artistic lineage to position himself *contra* Hollywood—despite his film being so engaged with the state of Hollywood. Following this I take some time to establish my theoretical framework comprising of romantic-period philosophers. I begin with Schopenhauer's theories of music from *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* [*The World as Will and Representation*, 1818/19]. Schopenhauer believed that music is the highest form of expression, in that it allows us access to the true nature of things (equivalent to Kant's 'thing in itself'). As I will describe, I am uncomfortable with Schopenhauer's transcendentalism. I deploy Friedrich Nietzsche's concepts of 'Apollonian-Dionysian', 'the eternal return', and 'the will to power', in order to circumvent Schopenhauer's unfalsifiable notion of 'truth', which leads me back to Gilles Deleuze's unfixed reality. If reality becomes static, then there is no potential for de/reindividuation, and hence there would be no cinematic individuation.

Nietzsche is used again to introduce a short section on Wagner, whose music is used prominently in *Ivansxtc*. Schopenhauer, Wagner, and Nietzsche form a chain of influence, although the latter eventually retracted his praise for the composer. Tolstoy also vehemently attacked Wagner in his 1897 book *Chto takoye iskusstvo?* [*What is Art?*]. I use these three behemoths of romantic thought and art in order to propose the presence of neoclassicism in contemporary Hollywood. All three either influenced, or were influenced by, each other. They fall easily into conversation with Tolstoy, Rose, and with Simondon and Gilles Deleuze. Having laid out this framework, I will perform three close readings of sequences in *Ivansxtc* which feature a particularly striking combination of visuals and music. I introduce Federico García Lorca's 'Theory of the Duende' as being pertinent to the viewer's experience of these scenes. Such moments, I will suggest, are instances of true cinematic individuation.

Hollywood, California: 2000

The millennium began with widespread anxiety over technological collapse due to the 'millennium bug'. Nothing happened. By the end of the year George W. Bush would beat Al Gore in a controversial election in which Bush lost the popular vote, and a potentially decisive recount in Florida was halted by the Supreme Court. One of the world's most powerful figures, Vladimir Putin, was elected President of Russia this year.

The power-lines of the coming decade were also being drawn in Hollywood where a format revolution was brewing with no sign of 'Y2K Bug' technophobia. In 1999 George Lucas unveiled the first mass public demonstrations of the now ubiquitous digital light processing (DLP) projector for two screenings of his new film: *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*.[7] The technology had its first European exposure for a Paris showing of *Toy Story 2* (John Lasseter, 1999) in 2000. 1999 also saw *The Matrix* (Lana and Lily Wachowski) make significant advances in the field of digital special effects, particularly the multi-camera, green screen setup used for the famous 'bullet time' sequences. The use of handheld digital cameras was notable in the Danish arthouse movement 'Dogme 95' in the late 1990s. Dogme films such as *Festen* (Thomas Vinterberg, 1998), and *Idioterne* [*The Idiots*] (Lars von Trier, 1998), used digital cameras to create jarring visual aesthetics. In 1999 Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez made a low-budget ($60,000) found-footage horror film called *The Blair Witch Project* using CP-16 (film) and Hi8 (digital) cameras. The eventual box office gross of $248.6 million made it the first financially lucrative film to feature significant (if partial) digital cinematography. Amongst all this movement at both commercial

[7] The technology had first been used the preceding year for some showings of the found-footage horror film *The Last Broadcast* (Stefan Avalos and Lance Weiler, 1998). *The Last Broadcast* was the first feature film to be shot, edited, and distributed digitally.

and artistic, American and European, budgetary, and conceptual extremes arrived *Ivansxtc*: one of the first films shot using high definition digital video.[8]

The digital 'break' in cinema has produced much hand-wringing and debate in both the film industry and in film studies departments. Christopher Kenneally's 2012 documentary *Side by Side* featured an exhaustive list of Hollywood luminary talking heads arguing the merits and flaws of celluloid and digital. Gallery artists such as Tacita Dean dedicate much of their practice to lionising the analogue format; others have embraced the reduced costs and liberating potential of the new medium. For example, artists like Jon Rafman explore the explicit properties of digital, online, and virtual reality filmmaking. In academia, the key point of intervention is frequently posed as an ontological crisis. As there is no longer a physical trace of light hitting celluloid and causing a reaction, theorists such as Lev Manovich argue that digital film loses its indexicality, a statement that is refuted by Tom Gunning.[9] Whilst this Bazinian-ontological question provokes a fascinating existentialist area of inquiry, it is not a fundamental underpinning of cinematic individuation. This thesis is concerned with *techne* rather than specific technologies. Although I am interested in the aesthetic qualities of the digital image, and my discussion encroaches upon ideas of ontology, this is not the place to intervene in this Bazinian debate.

Death and Ecstasy

Filmmaker Bernard Rose cut his teeth directing music videos for UB40, Bronski Beat, and Frankie Goes to Hollywood in the 1980s. His first feature film, the dark fantasy *Paperhouse* (1988), was a critical success and retains cult status.[10] In 1992 Rose made what remains his

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[8] Released earlier in 2000 than *Ivansxtc*, *A Girl, Three Guys, and a Gun* (Brent Florence) was also shot entirely using Sony's HDW 700A digital camera.
[9] See Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001); and Tom Gunning, 'Moving away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality', *differences*, vol. 18, issue 1 (Spring 2007): 29 – 52.
[10] Roger Ebert gave the film a perfect four-star rating (also awarded to *Ivansxtc*).

most well-known film: an adaptation of Clive Barker's short story *The Forbidden* (1985) retitled *Candyman*. Distributed by Sony-owned Tristar, the film was a financial success and is now a staple in the horror film canon. Rose had another minor hit with a Ludwig van Beethoven biopic, *Immortal Beloved* (1994), for Columbia, but his first Tolstoy adaptation, *Anna Karenina* (1997), tanked at Warner Bros.

His reputation having diminished following *Anna Karenina*, Rose found funding and support for projects beginning to dry up. Frustrated by his lack of studio backing (the same studio that had cut *Anna Karenina* severely without his permission), Rose's perceptions of Hollywood began to sour. Inspired by the struggles with addiction and eventual suicide of star Hollywood agent Jay Moloney, and by Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, Rose crafted a scabrous portrayal of the inner workings of Hollywood with co-writer/producer and actress Lisa Enos.[11] They shot the film cheaply on Sony HDW-700A HD video format digital cameras. This allowed them to pitch the film as a zero-risk project and strike a deal with Artisan Entertainment for distribution.

The film begins with a montage of images of daybreak in LA set to a soundtrack of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* and the screams and voice of dying Hollywood agent Ivan Beckman (Danny Huston). At Ivan's office, the news of his unexpected death filters in. His colleagues debate whether his hard-partying, drug and alcohol-fuelled lifestyle was the cause. Aside from his secretary Lucy Lawrence (Morgan Walsh), nobody at the office displays more than superficial grief. Instead, attention quickly turns to securing the business of Ivan's clients, especially Don West (Peter Weller), an A-list movie star.

Following a fight between West and neurotic film director Danny McTeague (James Merendino), the narrative flashes back several weeks. We join Ivan in West's limo en route to a film premiere. Ivan is courting West to join his agency. West, an obnoxious sexist, snorts

[11] Moloney's clients included Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, and David Letterman.

cocaine off the inner thigh of Ivan's girlfriend Charlotte White (Lisa Enos). From here the film follows two narrative strands: Ivan's attempts to woo West and to greenlight McTeague's new film *Weeds*, and his reaction to a shocking diagnosis of lung cancer. Finding himself unable to tell any of his friends or family (except for two call girls who react with disgust), Ivan instead increases the intensity of his already high-octane lifestyle.

Having successfully convinced West to join the agency, and having secured backing for *Weeds* (which either nobody has read, or else thinks is terrible), Ivan is fêted at work. That night he collapses and is taken to hospital. Ivan lies in intensive care, unable to communicate with speech or writing. His last interactions are with a nurse who embraces and caresses him. He dies to the strains of *Tristan and Isolde*.

The plot of *Ivansxtc* differs somewhat from Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. The Ivan of the novella is a bourgeois judge who lives a wholly unremarkable life. His marriage is loveless and his children distant. He spends his time and energy almost solely on work. Tolstoy mockingly describes him: 'Ivan Ilych's life had been straightforward, ordinary and dreadful in the extreme.'[12] After a fall in his home, Ivan becomes sick. Despite trying all remedies available, his condition steadily declines to the point where he is bed stricken, and thus unable to work. With his life's pursuit denied, Ivan is forced to evaluate the purpose of being. Comparing his own life to that of his only companion Gerasim, a simpleton servant, he concludes that a good life is that which is lived for others rather than for oneself. Having achieved this insight, he dies.

C. J. G. Turner proposes that Tolstoy intended two lessons to be taken from Ivan's final days, 'first, a consciousness that life required of him more than the shallow, self-serving relationships he had cultivated; and, second, a sense of pity for or empathy with others that

[12] Tolstoy, 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich', 166. This recalls the famous opening lines of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1878): 'All happy families are alike; but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion.' *Anna Karenina*, 13.

potentially breaks down our isolation'.[13] Walter Kaufmann provides a more self-centred reading following Martin Heidegger's writing on *dasein* [being-in-the-world]:

> Propriety does not permit Ivan to shriek. He must always pretend that he will soon get better. It would be offensive for him to admit that he is dying. But in the end he has the courage to defy propriety and shriek. 'The development of such a superior indifference alienates *dasein* from its ownmost non-relational potentiality-for-being.' It is only when he casts aside his self-deceiving indifference that Ivan returns to himself, to his capacity for love, and leaves behind the self-betrayal of his alienated inauthentic life.[14]

Although Turner sees an outward turn, and Kaufmann an inward one, the *topos* of both arguments is that by discarding inauthenticity, Ivan becomes capable of establishing authentic social individuations with himself and other (authentically alive) beings.

What *Ivansxtc* retains from its source are the immense pain of death, the estrangement from family life in service of an (ultimately uncaring) work environment, and the companionship provided at the last by a paid assistant. Whilst key details have changed (although perhaps Rose's point is that myopic juridical work is just as contemptible as the excesses of Hollywood which in turn are just as banal as juridical work), the book and the film share a thematic resonance. Mark Freeman suggests that the novella 'is about the consequences of living without meaning, that is, without a true and abiding connection to one's life, taken as a whole phenomenon, as a story … worthy of being told.'[15] Freeman, a psychologist, refers to humanity's need to order existence upon narrative grounds. That which cannot be sorted into a cohesive narrative will play in memory (itself a narrative device) unsatisfactorily. For example, I feel I have achieved more with my day when I leave the house and commute to the library to work than if I had simply stayed home to write. In

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[13] Turner, 'Ivan Ilyich - Resident and Stranger', 52. In the same edited volume Daniel Rancour-Laferriere argues that the novella is about the impossibility of imagining one's own death: 'Narcissism, Masochism, and Denial in *The Death of Ivan Ilych*', 117 – 133.
[14] Kaufmann, 'Existentialism and Death', 81. Kaufmann quotes from Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* [*Being and Time*, 1927], 298.
[15] Freeman, 'Death, Narrative Integrity, and the Radical Challenge of Self-Understanding: A Reading of Tolstoy's *Death of Ivan Ilych*', 384.

the former instance, I create the sense of progress, rhythm, and journey that allows me to recollect the day more easily in narrative terms. Whilst I may have achieved an equivalent or greater amount of work at home, the experience is too unordered to easily form a sufficient narrative.

Freeman continues:

> Ivan Ilych [sic] had been living his life without an ending in mind; and without any sense of an ending, there could be no story, but only a series of events, experiences, moments, valued only for their pleasure or their avoidance of pain.… Ilych is the 'socially constructed self' par excellence—his life was aimless, devoid of significant purpose and devoid of any organising principle or principles that might give it meaning. It was devoid, in short, of narrative integrity.

This provides a rationale to the flashback structure that both the novella and the film utilise. As both Ivans have lived lives consisting of fragmentary instances, it is only with death that they can properly evaluate their existence. Death provides an ending to the story, and thus imposes a narrative structure upon the life that preceded it. The lives of both men are suddenly legible to themselves, and the chief revelation is that they lived life for themselves, not for others. This is writ substantially larger in the film. Hollywood-Ivan drifts from meaningless encounter to meaningless encounter, searching for instant sensation, and ingesting whatever substances he can find to dull the pain—both physical and metaphysical.

This evokes Gilles Deleuze's conception of a life as 'pure immanence, neutral, beyond good and evil, for it was only the subject that incarnated it in the midst of things that made it good or bad. The life of such individuality fades away in favour of the singular life immanent to a man who no longer has a name, though he can be mistaken for no other. A singular essence, a life…'[16] For Deleuze, a life is an immanent condition of collective becoming. It is a virtual plane from which certain attributes are actualised to form individual subjectivity (much like Simondon's principle of individuation or Saul/Paul's messianic

[16] Deleuze, 'Immanence: A Life' (1995), in *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, 29.

condition which is always collective as it is available to all but can be possessed by none). Life is an inherently pure mantle that is only corrupted by individual subjects, living individual lives (indeed the concept of corruptibility is itself a human construction).

In a lecture on Tolstoy delivered at Wellesley College (circa 1940-41), Vladimir Nabokov suggested that 'Ivan lived a bad life and since a bad life is nothing but the death of the soul, then Ivan lived a living death; and since beyond death is God's living light, then Ivan died into new Life—Life with a capital L.'[17] Life with a capital L refers to a transcendent life (life beyond, or after, this one) but also resembles Deleuze's life (which he occasionally capitalises as 'LIFE'). No matter how much of a mess we might make of our life, we eventually return to virtual immanence: back to pre-subjective potential. What Nabokov perceives as transcendence is in fact a return, or 'reduction', back to immanence. This is not to say that life is void of meaning. Ivan's is a cautionary tale. Similarly to Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), Ivan is forced to relive his life (through the flashback structure) until he comes to the realisation that he lived what Nabokov calls 'a living death' because 'death and bad life are synonymous'.[18]

What these narratives attempt to convey is the importance of self-reflection (an examined life perhaps). Responding to Tolstoy's description of Ivan's life as 'straightforward, ordinary and dreadful in the extreme', Nabokov takes this to mean that 'it was terrible because it had become automatic'.[19] In terms of *Ivansxtc*, cinematic individuation offers the viewer an avenue through which to reflect whilst simultaneously connecting them to the world, both physically and psychologically. To explain how this works in certain sequences in *Ivansxtc* that combine distinct visuals with Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, I am using a triangulation of theories from Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Wagner himself.

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[17] Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature*, 237.
[18] Nabokov, 239.
[19] Nabokov, 241.

Schopenhauer's Aesthetics

In *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer explores our perception and conception of the world around us. Drawing on Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [*Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781], and Plato's *Politeia* [*The Republic*, 380 BCE], he proposes that the visible world we experience as reality is an illusive construct structured by human desire (will). Behind this lies Kant's *Ding an sich* [thing-in-itself] and Plato's ideal forms. Schopenhauer discusses Plato's cave allegory, in which prisoners are chained facing the wall of a cave. Their only experience of the outside world are the shadows cast onto the wall by the fire behind them. For Schopenhauer, the shadow play represents the world as will as it shows 'the visible world to be a phenomenon which in itself is void and empty, and which has meaning and borrowed reality only through the thing that expresses itself in it (the thing-in-itself in the one case, the Idea in the other).'[20] Thus, our experience of reality is equivalent to the prisoners in the cave. The true *Ding an sich* lies outside the boundaries of our perception. The world of will that we experience 'springs from lack, from deficiency, and thus from suffering.'[21] If this world is based on phenomena that have no physical reality (shadows on the wall), then you will never be able to grasp anything which you desire to possess. This conception of will as a desire that represents lack would later influence Sigmund Freud's writings on desire as representing that which one does not possess.

Both Ivans (Beckman and Ilyich) display such desires: for women, sensation, money, property, social standing, and professional respect. I am less interested in how Ivan represents humanity's inherent ignorance and failure, than in how this pessimistic condition can be overcome. Schopenhauer offers a path away from will that leads to the true realm of Plato's

[20] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation: Volume I*, 172.
[21] Schopenhauer, 196.

ideals. He writes that 'the Idea comes to us more easily from the work of art than directly from nature and from reality, arises solely from the fact that the artist, who knew only the Idea and not reality, clearly repeated in his work only the Idea, separated it out from reality'.[22] The artist seeks to represent something of the mind (arising from a potentiality), and transcribes this potentiality into something abstracted from reality (as a true depiction of reality is inherently impossible). Thus, the artwork cannot be a part of the world of will, and thus must belong to the level of representation. But if we can experience the artwork within the world of will then can it truly belong to this higher plane? Schopenhauer places emphasis on a concept of genius—an individual imbued with access to higher forms—that is perhaps incongruous with our contemporary understanding of the term.

Of all the arts, Schopenhauer proposes two forms that have the greatest effect on their audience, have the greatest potential to overcome the world of will, and which resonate within *Ivansxtc*. First is tragedy:

> to be regarded, and is recognised, as the summit of poetic art, both as regards the greatness of the effect and the difficulty of the achievement.… The unspeakable pain, the wretchedness and misery of mankind, the triumph of wickedness, the scornful mastery of chance, and the irretrievable fall of the just and the innocent are all here presented to us; and here is to be found a significant hint as to the nature of the world and of existence. It is the antagonism of the will with itself which is here most completely unfolded at the highest grade of its objectivity, and which comes into fearful prominence.[23]

Tragedy is promoted as the enemy of will as it makes this condition abundantly apparent. Tragic forms are reflexive and distancing, in that they make us aware of the operation of will upon reality as it is experienced—that reality is always obscured by will. A film such as *Ivansxtc* places the viewer at a double remove. Its Hollywood setting flaunts its status as a constructed film, and its tragic narrative arc lays bare the painful experience that is life driven according to insatiable will.

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[22] Schopenhauer, 195.
[23] Schopenhauer, 252 – 253.

Second is music:

> since it passes over the Ideas, is also quite independent of the phenomenal world, positively ignores it, and, to a certain extent, could still exist even if there were no world at all, which cannot be said of the other arts … music is by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the Ideas, but a *copy of the will itself*.… For this reason the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence.[24]

Whilst Schopenhauer's description of tragedy as a distancing device is important, it is this calibration of the power of music that is vital to my project. Whether knowingly or not, Schopenhauer solves a self-made aporia. The issue with such concepts as the *Ding an sich* and the Ideas is that they present unfalsifiable fixed experiences of reality that are themselves products of fallible sense data and thought processes. Due to its unfalsifiable nature, this problem cannot be resolved. However, we can turn to Nietzsche, and to music, in order to circumnavigate this paradox. Music can bypass Kant and Plato by presenting what Deleuze reads as a Nietzschean 'power of the false', a simulacrum that destroys the possibility of Platonic Ideas, and thus avoids the possibility of a frozen, fixed reality. Giorgio Agamben describes that, for Nietzsche, 'Art is the eternal self-generation of the will to power. As such, it detaches itself both from the activity of the artist and from the sensibility of the spectator to posit itself as the fundamental trait of universal becoming.'[25] In other words, art is nihilistic in the sense that it defies fixed meanings and structures so as to provoke a kind of 'meaninglessness'.

Nietzsche was once a devotee of Schopenhauer, before later abandoning him. I will discuss Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* later in this chapter and Schopenhauer and Nietzsche can, and should, be employed in tandem when discussing Wagner. The former was Wagner's greatest philosophical influence and the latter was the most notorious philosophiser and

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[24] Schopenhauer, 257.
[25] Agamben, *L'uomo senza contenuto* [*The Man without Content*, 1970], 93.

harshest critic of Wagner.[26] First it is pertinent to restate some of the Nietzschean terminology described in both the 'Introduction' and in the first chapter.

The Eternal Return and The Will to Power

Nietzsche claims that the only definite truth about the world is its erroneous nature. He describes this whilst simultaneously hectoring philosophical truth seekers such as Plato, Kant, and Schopenhauer:

> if, with the virtuous enthusiasm and awkwardness exhibited by some philosophers, one wanted to abolish the 'apparent world' altogether, well, assuming *you* could do that—at any rate nothing would remain of your 'truth' either! Indeed, what compels us to assume there exists any essential antithesis between 'true' and 'false?' Is it not enough to suppose grades of apparentness and as it were lighter and darker shades and tones of appearance—different *valuers*.[27]

Nietzsche terms this approach 'perspectivism', and situates it counter to objectivity: 'in so far as the word "knowledge" has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings—"Perspectivism."'[28]

Deleuze links Nietzsche's perspectivism to the concept of the eternal return (recurrence), described in *The Gay Science* as a demon forcing the subject to live their life over and over, eternally. Deleuze views the eternal return as another simulacrum, as it is the eternal return to difference. He insists that:

> it must not be interpreted as the return of something that is 'one' or the 'same'.… It is not some one thing which returns but rather returning itself is the one thing which is affirmed of diversity or multiplicity. In other words,

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[26] For a detailed expunging of his connection with Wagner see Friedrich Nietzsche's *Der Fall Wagner* [1888, *The Case of Wagner*] and *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* (1888), in *The Case of Wagner, Nietzsche Contra Wagner, The Twilight of the Idols, The Antichrist*, trans. Thomas Common (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1899), 1 – 59; 61 – 93. For a scholarly account of Nietzsche's schism from Wagner and Schopenhauer see Bryan Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 2000).
[27] Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse: Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft* [*Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, 1886], 65.
[28] Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht* [*The Will to Power*, 1910], 267.

> identity in the eternal return does not describe the nature of that which returns but, on the contrary, the fact of returning for that which differs.[29]

As with each copy (simulacrum), each return is at a further remove from the original. Or, to put it another way, each return is an addition to the original. It is *plus*-original. For both Nietzsche and Deleuze, each step away from a concept of originality or truth is positive because it shows us how such concepts were always themselves either unattainable or false. The return, despite its origin as a proposed torture, is, in later books, equated to joy. Nietzsche's parodic prophet Zarathustra eventually declaims it in the name of joy, 'joy does not want heirs, nor children—joy wants itself, wants eternity, wants recurrence, wants all-eternally-self-same.'[30] In other words joy corresponds to desire, but not desire-as-lack that Schopenhauer (will) and Freud expound. Instead, Nietzsche's joy (will/desire) inspires Deleuze's approach to desire as a creative and productive force. It is desire for desire itself: for human potential. Deleuze writes that the eternal return 'makes willing [desiring] a creation, it brings about the equation "willing = creating."'[31]

The Nietzschean will to power is sometimes misinterpreted as a brutal desire for dominion over one's fellow persons.[32] In his own words: 'the will to power, which is simply the will to life.' This 'life' is the same which Deleuze and Nabokov put forward: a life as a potentiality. Will to power is also desire for life, desire for the greatest potential in life. When Nietzsche pronounced the death of God he did not infer the end of meaning and ethics.

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[29] Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie* [*Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 1962], 45. Such a process can be found in some modernist art. For example, Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* (1925) which uses constant rhythms of repetition and variation. Stein frequently repeats the very idea of repetition: 'more and more each one is repeating and each part of their living has its own repeating and makes of that part a history coming out from them, then in the whole living there comes out more and more and more a repeating that was in them always inside them', and so on (London: Dalkey Archive, 1995), 193. This can also be seen the infinite canon structure of process music such as Morton Feldman's *Piece for Four Pianos* (1957) or Steve Reich's *It's Gonna Rain* (1965).
[30] Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra* [*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1883-1891], 282.
[31] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 64.
[32] Nietzsche is often tarred by his adoption by certain thinkers in Nazi Germany. He was, in fact, resolutely anti-fascist, anti-racist, and anti-nihilist (in the common understanding of the term).

Rather, he announced the birth of human potential that transcended the limitations of subservience to a higher power.

The humanism of *Zarathustra* is rooted in this belief in human potential and evolution, 'a river of becoming'.[33] Zarathustra proclaims, 'where Life is, there too is will: though not will to life; but—so I teach you—will to power!'[34] The misinterpretation of will to power is rooted in the seeming opposition between power and life. But because life is bound up with Schopenhauer's negative description of the world as will, a new terminology is required. Nietzschean power is not in opposition to life; rather, it is the means to overcome the notion of life as will; to proceed towards a better experience of the human condition.

Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*

Richard Wagner was hugely influenced by Schopenhauer. Wagner's 1870 book-length essay, *Beethoven*, contains a thorough exegesis on *The World as Will and Representation*.[35] And his correspondence with Franz Liszt reveals, amongst other references, a shared attraction to, and influence by, Buddhist philosophy, especially the idea that experiencing sympathy for another could facilitate a move away from individuality and towards a collective oneness.[36] Schopenhauer saw in opera an ideal combination of his two most championed forms of representation: tragedy and music. He wrote 'that the addition of poetry to music is so welcome, and a song with intelligible words gives such profound joy, is due to the fact that our most direct and most indirect methods of knowledge are here stimulated simultaneously

[33] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 98.
[34] Nietzsche, 100.
[35] See Richard Wagner, *Beethoven*, trans. Roger Allen (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2014).
[36] See Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt, *Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt, Volume 2*, trans Francis Hueffer (Dodo Press, 1889), and Elizabeth Wendell Barry, 'What Wagner Found in Schopenhauer's Philosophy', *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 1 (January 1925): 124 – 137.

and in union.'[37] A similar movement occurs within cinematic individuation. The direct stimulation of music responds to the affective attraction, and the indirect stimulation of words responds to the cognitive distancing. Ultimately, in *Ivansxtc*, the use of opera corresponds to affective attraction, but as opera also provokes cognitive distance, it is apparent that there are mise-en-abyme operations within cinematic individuation.

Wagner's devotee turned critic, Nietzsche, extrapolates a similar dualism in music and words, described in his customary mythological terms as a dualism between Apollo and Dionysus. Apollo represents the rational mind whilst Dionysus represents chaotic emotion. According to Nietzsche 'the single sound, as opposed to the image, is already Dionysian, and the single image, together with concept and words, is already Apollinian [sic], as opposed to the music.'[38] Nietzsche applied this dichotomy to opera in particular, calling it 'the fusion of the Dionysian and the Apollinian.'[39] I equate the Apollonian effect with Schopenhauer's indirect knowledge and my cerebral distancing, and the Dionysian effect with direct knowledge and emotive engagement. Whilst Nietzsche refers to the 'image' of stage drama, I will later apply this thinking to the interplay between the music and high-definition digital imagery in *Ivansxtc*.

Composed between 1857 and 1859, but not premiered until 1865 due to the level of funding and technical and artistic expertise it required to stage, Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* is inspired by the Anglo-Norman legend of *Tristan and Iseult*.[40] The opera tells the tale of Tristan, a knight in the service of King Marke of Cornwall, who is sent to fetch the king's betrothed, Isolde, from Ireland. Furious that Tristan has returned after killing her previous fiancé, Isolde plots to poison both herself and him. However, Isolde's maid switches the

[37] Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation: Volume II*, 449.
[38] Nietzsche, 'On Music and Words' (1871), 116.
[39] Nietzsche, 116.
[40] Wagner's main source for the legend was Gottfried van Strassburg's courtly romance *Tristan* (circa 1200 – 1210). Gottfried himself used Thomas of Britain's French poem *Tristan* (1160) as the basis for his telling.

poison with a love potion causing the pair to fall madly in love with one another. Back at court, the lovers are frustrated by the courtly life of daylight, as they are kept apart. Tristan decries day as a false reality, insisting that only in the realm of night can they be together. The lovers are eventually discovered (at daybreak), and Tristan is wounded. He lies dying at his castle in Brittany as Isolde strives to reach him. As she arrives he dies. King Marke arrives too late to absolve the pair and Isolde sings a final aria, the 'Liebestod', and dies of a broken heart beside Tristan.

The opera strongly resonates with Schopenhauerian philosophy on a structural level. Both the narrative and the music perpetually defer resolution, suggesting the world of will that constantly evades satisfaction. Bryan Magee writes that 'the entire work is a sort of musical equivalent of Schopenhauer's doctrine that existence is an inherently unsatisfiable web of longings, willings and strivings from which the only permanent liberation is the cessation of being.'[41] Magee discerns that the opera's two worlds of day and night correspond to Schopenhauer's two worlds of will and representation. Day is the phenomenal world 'of outer sense, the world with which our consciousness and our senses are equipped to deal', whilst night 'is noumenal [*Ding an sich*], the realm of permanent reality.'

If Wagner is attempting to unite these two orders, as Schopenhauer suggested was possible in opera, then presenting them dialectically does not work. Nietzsche's axis of Apollonian and Dionysian allows for a less antagonistic reading of an opera he called the '*opus metaphysicum* of all art'.[42] He described *Tristan and Isolde* thus:

> This Dionysian effect is so powerful that it ultimately forces the Apollonian drama itself into a sphere where it begins to speak with Dionysian wisdom, negating itself and its Apollonian visibility. So the difficult relation between the Apollonian and the Dionysian in tragedy should really be symbolized through a fraternal bond between both deities: Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo, and Apollo finally speaks the language of Dionysus, and so the highest goal of tragedy and art itself is achieved.[43]

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[41] Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (1983), 380.
[42] Nietzsche, 'Richard Wagner in Bayreuth' (1876), 232.
[43] Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* [*The Birth of Tragedy*, 1872], 117.

Like cinematic individuation, the ultimate form of the Dionysian-Apollonian bond makes seemingly paradoxical forces compatible. *Tristan and Isolde* brings the worlds of will and representation, intellect and emotion, and order and chaos together in the same sphere of existence. The question is no longer that of a true reality vs. an illusive reality, but how the two are one and the same. As I will now illustrate using *Ivansxtc*, cinematic individuation allows us to experience the world in all these senses, and thus reconnects us to a sense of 'a world', even if we cannot ever say for sure that it is 'the world'.

Ivansxtc (prelude to Act I)

The film opens with a 'blue hour' (the period just before dawn) shot of LA, although the hillside scrub is silhouetted against a green sky [fig. 2.1]. The 'Prelude to Act I' of *Tristan and Isolde* plays on the score. The camera slowly pans left, fading into another long shot of LA as dawn breaks. In voiceover Ivan speaks: 'Last night I had this incredible pain. The pain was so strong that I took every pill in the goddamn house ... the pain wouldn't go away. I tried to find an image, one worthwhile image that would get me through it. And all I could find was shit. I couldn't find an image worth one goddamn thing.' During this monologue the camera cuts to a series of static street scenes. El Capitan Theatre fades into Grauman's Chinese Theatre [fig. 2.2]. More shots of LA taken from the hills surrounding the city precede the title screen [fig. 2.3], which shows bare tree branches silhouetted against the rising sun as the 'Liebestod' motif plays on the score. Several shots of palm-lined avenues fade together before a shot of the sun glinting off lawn sprinklers, and shining directly into the camera, is revealed [fig. 2.4]. An extreme long shot of the Hollywood sign [fig. 2.5] is accompanied by a digital delay effect on the Wagner score which causes the music to stutter and warp. A shot of an office building shows a car driving between two enormous doors [fig.

2.6], presumably a sculpture. This shot fades into a series of billboards. The first shows a giant cowboy with the words ‘impotent’ standing above a whisky bottle emblazoned with the words ‘life is harsh’. This is followed by an advert for a strip club, then various female models, before an advert for gin with the words ‘live a little’.

Figure 2.1. Predawn Los Angeles.

Figure 2.2. A superimposition fades from one movie theater to another.

Figure 2.3. The silhouette of the bare trees against the morning sun is symbolic of Ivan's diseased lungs.

Figure 2.4. A low-angle shot captures the sun shining through lawn sprinklers.

Figure 2.5. Deep focus captures the famous sign in the background.

Figure 2.6. Two doors that symbolise potential choices.

More shots of roads are followed by shots of LA residents going about their morning routines: waiting for the bus, setting up café tables, or jogging on the beach. A series of shots take the camera back further out into the hills and badlands before returning to the cityscape. The camera is again pointed directly at the sun, this time through the leaves of a tree, creating

abstract light patterns [fig. 2.7.]. As this shot fades, Ivan's cries of pain can be heard in voice(scream)over. The montage moves into a series of interior shots of a house. A portrait of Leo Tolstoy is shown in close-up lying on the ground. The titles read 'Based on "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" by LEO TOLSTOY' [fig. 2.8.]. This fades to a copy (Penguin edition) of the book lying open on a dressing table [fig. 2.9.]. Ivan's screams intensify as the camera cuts to a pen and paper and then to headphones lying next to a stack of CDs. A travelling shot filmed from a vehicle window shows a large cemetery rushing past. This fades into a low-angle shot of the Star of David sign at the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center which transitions to a slow tracking shot entering the hospital. The camera is pointing directly up (the viewpoint of one lying on a gurney). The sounds of doctors and medical equipment can be heard. The camera cuts to Ivan's hospital room. In a three-quarter slow-motion shot, his nurse (Caroleen Feeney) looks at him, leaves the room, and closes the door. For a moment, her head and shoulders are framed in the door window. The screen darkens until only the square of window light is visible. The screen then completely fades to black.

Figure 2.7. The camera is pointed at the sun to create an abstract play of light shining through leaves.

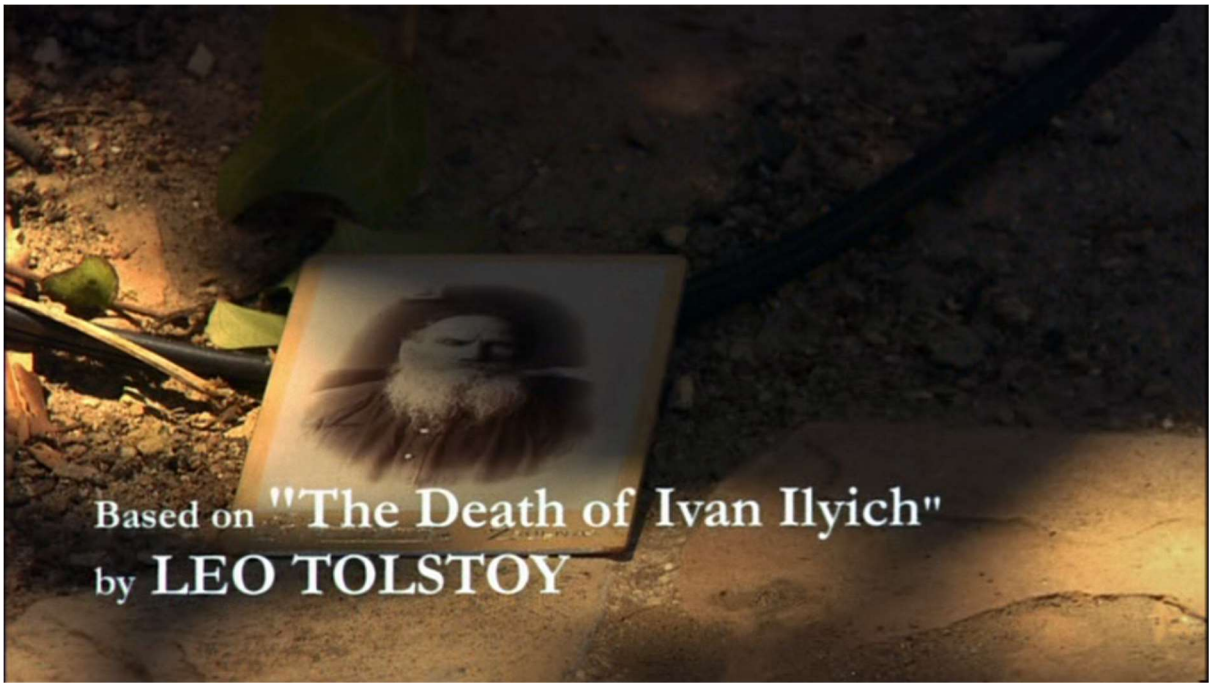

Figure 2.8. The film includes its 'author'.

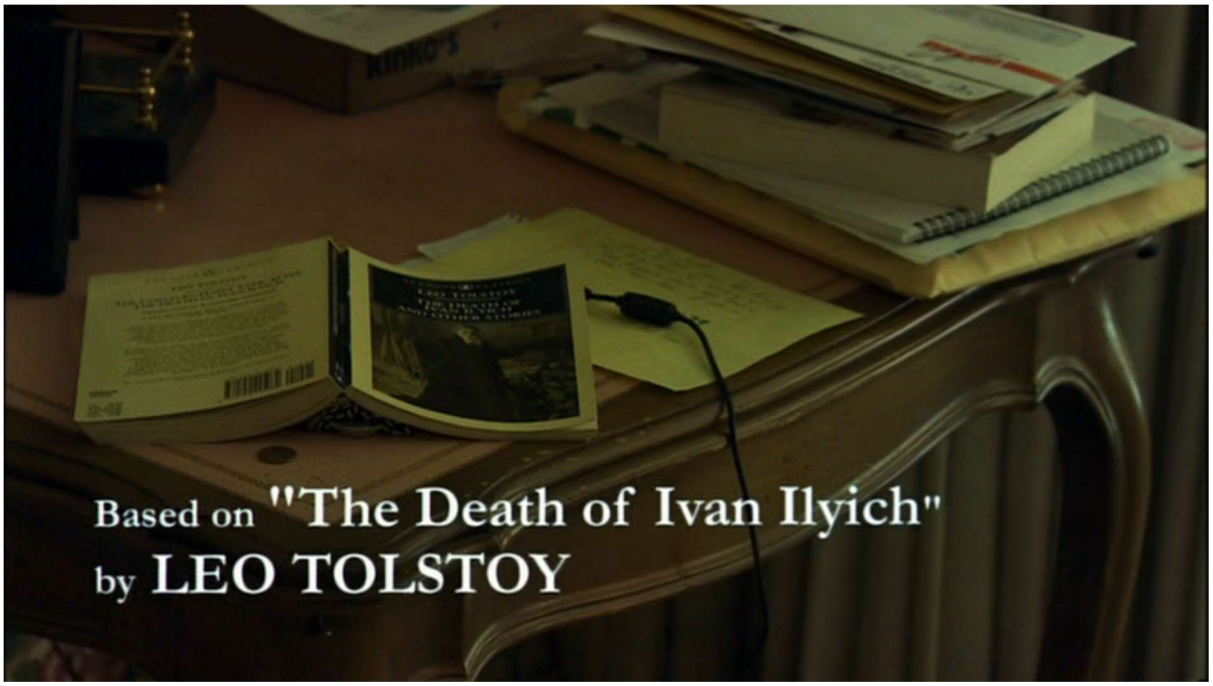

Figure 2.9. And suggests that a character within the film is reading the novella.

There is an immediate aesthetic shock to the opening of the film. The high-definition digital video images are so harsh and cold, and the initial stirrings of the opera are so epic in scope. Lisa Kernan writes that the images in the opening montage 'are rendered neither heroic, nostalgic, nor ugly by the format, but rather like snapshots: not exactly real life, yet

kind of regular … the image appears as successive moments frozen in time.'[44] Kernan describes a vision of the world lying somewhere between Schopenhauer's will and representation. This is neither the version of Los Angeles and Hollywood as seen in glossier films of the time such as *Get Shorty* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1995), nor is it the cold world of futile will. The music lends an intense affective sweep, but it is not a case of simple oppositions: beautiful romanticism against jarring digital imagery.

The prelude to *Tristan and Isolde* is notable for the 'Tristan Chord'. Whilst it is the structuring principal, the chord bears no conventional harmonic relationship to the rest of the piece (classifying the chord is an ongoing debate amongst music scholars). It occurs in the second bar (it is the first chord of the prelude) and reoccurs periodically thereafter as a leitmotif. This imbues the music with a sense of frustration and delayed resolution. The poet and playwright Federico García Lorca referred to such music as possessing 'duende'. Inspired by Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian, the 'black sounds' of duende are an embodied, non-intellectual concept: 'a power, not a work … a struggle, not a thought … not a question of ability, but … of spontaneous creation.'[45] Despite its overwhelming power, the opera is not merely an exercise in pleasure; indeed, it aims to thwart such an experience for as long as is sustainable.

The digital cinematography is not simply an exercise in jarring imagery. Whilst there is undoubtedly something confrontational in such starkly naked pictures, the medium conveys its own form of beauty. Certain scenes look televisual and cheap, but the format captures light in a very particular way [see figs. 2.4 and 2.7] as to evoke surprising moments of pictorial delight. This is due to a low data rate that causes bit-starvation when subjected to over-exposure to light or sudden movement. This leads to corruption in the compression procedure which causes visual distortions.

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[44] Kernan, 'The Passion of Global Hollywood: *Ivansxtc*', 32.
[45] García Lorca, 'Play and Theory of the Duende' (1933), 49.

It is telling that such moments tend to be during these Wagner-set montages. Thus, the digital image which one would think of as demonstrating the harsh world of will takes on the mantle of representation. The opera remains a work of representation, but through the Tristan Chord also evokes the unfulfilling nature of will. I do not suggest that either mode wholly represents one or the other position, instead the two interplay with and complement each other. Schopenhauer wrote that music 'gives the most profound, ultimate, and secret information on the feeling expressed in the words, or the action presented in the opera. It expresses their real and true nature and makes us acquainted with the innermost soul of the events and occurrences'.[46] It is thus through the assemblage of music and images that an effect is created. The forms are not reducible to constituent parts and it is no longer possible to say that the digital image is certainly Apollonian and that the Wagner score is certainly Dionysian. Once the relationship is formed the two are indiscernible. The music activates the Dionysian properties of the image, and the images instil the Apollonian in the music. Then this cycle continues incessantly vice-versa, to the point where the original effect of each constituent part is inconsequential.

Ivan's voiceover claims that he could not find a worthwhile image to relieve the pain of his suffering. I will later propose that Ivan finds several 'worthwhile' images in the climatic montage. But considering his words, the opening montage is reflecting the deferral of satisfaction experienced in the prelude to *Tristan and Isolde*. Similarly, the experience of cinematic individuation that the viewer can access via this striking synthesis of music and imagery is also deflated by the primary diegesis of the film. However, like Ivan's ultimate peace, and *Tristan and Isolde*'s final resolution, the viewer can experience complete cinematic individuation in the film's climax.

[46] Schopenhauer, *World as Will: II*, 448.

With the benefit of this dramatic irony, the opening images represent all that is unfulfilling in Ivan's life—none represent anything 'worth a damn' in his estimation. Predawn LA looks enveloped by a green toxic cloud in figure 2.1, whilst the signifiers of Hollywood such as the movie palaces and the famous sign [figs. 2.2 and 2.5] are all deemed to be 'not worth a damn'. The superimposition fade between El Capitan and Grauman's Chinese Theatre [fig. 2.2] suggests a lack of individual identity for these two Charles E. Toberman-developed 'ethnic-revival' themed cinemas. Known for its palm trees, it is unusual (in film and TV) to instead see dead branches [fig. 2.4] in LA. The resemblance to blood vessels combines with the title screen to draw a link between the death of Ivan and the literal and symbolic deadness of the landscape.

The two doors in figure 2.6 invoke, once again, the idea of Janus, the Roman deity of doorways (see Chapter 1). The end of both the opening and closing montages show Ivan's nurse closing the door on his room before the lights go down, and he presumably dies. The doorway is linked to the idea of the end of life and perhaps passage to another life. That, or the closing of the door represents the end of passage. The final door in the opening sequence demarcates Ivan's final room, hence the importance of his death as a signifier for the completion of passage. One of the doors in figure 2.6 is in sunlight, the other is in shade. This is not a case of light vs. dark, or heaven vs. hell; the choice is arbitrary, but serves to represent a degree of self-reflection on Ivan's (and our own) condition and life. Likewise, the viewer, amid this aesthetically overloaded montage, is jolted by this abstract image and forced to consider its contents. They too are presented with the opportunity to make a choice. Cinematic individuation rarely works without the complicity of the spectator, or at least not without their willingness to be overpowered.

In addition to the disruptive aesthetics and Hollywood setting of the opening, the intrusion of the author (of the original text) in figures 2.8 and 2.9 acts as a further distancing

device. The titles revealing the source material themselves add a textual layer, and the photograph of Tolstoy adds a degree of materiality to this information. The actual book, or rather Penguin's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories*, challenges the viewer's sense of belief in the fictional world of the film. I personally find it unsettling, as I also own this precise edition. That aside, the inclusion of the book within the filmic space suggests that the characters are aware of the story. That the book is face down and cracked open at what appears to be the right number of pages (I can vouch for this) and on what looks like a bedside dresser supports this claim.

Who is reading it? The paper work and stuffed manila envelope might suggest Ivan the agent. In which case, he is reading about his own demise. Perhaps this is the bedside table of director Bernard Rose, consulting the book as he prepares to film *Ivansxtc*. That eventuality would be a double intrusion of authorial presence into the diegetic space of the film. This may not be as explicit as the onscreen authors in *New Nightmare* and *Adaptation*, but it is more insidious, and thus potentially more unsettling. Whichever possibility is considered, the resulting conclusion is destabilising. The character either responds to the text of his own death, or the film is made from within. A happier solution is to suggest that Ivan learns how to encounter his death from Tolstoy's novella, just as we may do the same using either or both entwined texts.

Kernan writes that the effect of this opening montage:

> is a Hollywood stripped of the mythic yet imparted with the sublime: a deathbed revelation that transcends place yet ultimately offers us back Hollywood as life-sized.… Both the Hollywood satires in films such as *The Player* and the nostalgic Hollywood-worship of contemporary popular culture are upended by this opening's representations of Hollywood space as alive-and dying.[47]

[47] Kernan, 'Passion of Global Hollywood', 33.

By representing Hollywood in stark digital imagery, and by mixing the quotidian with the iconic, these opening snapshots represent Hollywood as something less fantastical than usual depictions. The notion of the city of eternal sunshine where these legendary stars are immortalised onscreen is challenged. The world without death is a frozen world. Rose proffers a world of seasons and of mortality. This is the eternal return to difference; the powers of the false that unlock the world and allow for change, potentialities, and becomings. It is an evocation of García Lorca's duende for the audience. The duende, which is tied to the vagaries of emotion, religious fervour, and creative energies, bypasses rational and empirical systems, algorithms, and so on. So it is that the romanticism of *Ivansxtc* (both in its aesthetics and the nineteenth century philosophy it invokes) comes to stand as an ideological tool. In such instances the film privileges an emotional response over a rational response. Or rather, rationality allows emotional responses to inform and subsume it. As with what William Brown calls 'embodied cognition': 'Visceral responses, emotions, and conscious thought are not separate levels of human existence, but instead form a continuum that cannot be separated.'[48]

The Party

Having found himself in a hotel room with star actor Don West and several women, Ivan takes cocaine, drinks, and smokes (despite having received his cancer diagnosis). Don pressures one of his female hanger-ons (Victoria Silvstedt) to perform a sexual act on Ivan and the two go out onto a roof terrace. The scene, like the rest of the film, is shot with hand-held cameras in a *cinéma vérité* style. Ivan and the woman are framed in a full shot against the edge of the balcony. The lights of the city stretch out behind them. Tinny

[48] Brown, *Supercinema*, 129.

electronic dance music plays on the score. A sudden crescendo and powerful drum beat motivates a cut to a close-up of Ivan's face leaning backwards over the balcony. Shallow focus makes the city lights blur and float behind him. The sound of a helicopter's rotor blades synchronises with the dance music. The camera zooms in on the helicopter before a whip pan picks out Ivan and his companion laughing. The camera cuts to a tracking shot that re-enters the hotel room where Don and his guests are dancing, and strobe lighting has been turned on. The camera cuts several times, but this is hard to discern due to an increase in the frequency of the strobing. The camera lingers on a close-up of Ivan smiling blissfully with his eyes closed. As he opens his eyes, however, his expression turns to apprehension [fig. 2.10]. The dance music fades out and is replaced by gentle piano music. The scene fades into Ivan driving home, the piano music continues. This sequence plays out in wobbly handheld shots taken from the backseat intercut with extreme close-ups of Ivan's face. He looks sick and the camera has trouble keeping him in the centre of the frame. He runs a red light, narrowly avoids hitting another car, and crashes into a lamppost.

Figure 2.10. Through the strobe lighting Ivan's ecstasy/agony is revealed.

Mark Freeman writes of the literary Ivan as a socially constructed person who shows how all of us are social constructs: 'even in the midst of our being socially constructed, we know what virtue is. How else could Ivan Ilych have known that his life had been so terribly wrong.'[49] That is to say, we are aware of how our socially constructed society constructs its own system of values. This party scene marks the epiphanic moment where Ivan realises his place within society. We see him as social construct par excellence. Having received his diagnoses, having been shown his biological life in all its frailties, his actions are still dominated by the extreme social coding of his profession. Guided by the whims of clients whom he must seduce, he willfully subscribes to the belief that he has no control over his life. If Tolstoy meant his readers to recognise themselves in his 'everyman' Ilyich, then Hollywood-Ivan might strike the audience as representing a blunt version of their own lives within a free market economy: work, leisure, and family interactions as a series of commercial transactions over which they have little to no control. A dehumanising sense that one is just a cog in the system's machine.

The film presents a kind of de/reindividuation here. We see Ivan easily coerced into doing cocaine and performing a sexual act with a stranger. All the scenes of nudity and sex in *Ivansxtc* are profoundly unerotic yet are so frequent. As my epitaph from Antonioni reads, 'Eros is sick'. It is not only Eros but Ivan who is sick. If Eros represents a life-drive (will to power), then this scene shows Ivan's self-awareness that this force is lacking—and has become subordinate to Thanatos: the death drive. However, this prevailing sense of death brings Ivan, and the viewer, in proximity to duende—the fecund property of art in the throes of death. If you are merely a cog in the machine, then taking control of your own death—even if it leads to destruction—at least restores some momentary agency and creativity.

[49] Freeman 'Radical Challenge of Self-Understanding', 395.

As Ivan leans over the balcony there is a smash-cut into a close-up as the sound of a helicopter matches the rhythm of the electronic dance music playing at the party. He re-enters the party where the strobe light takes over the rhythmic match. There is the sense of pressure building. At this stage, for Ivan and for the viewer, these complementary rhythms are operating on a purely affective level. The sensory experience is pleasurable, but is only the start of the process of cinematic individuation. The physical sensations of what Schopenhauer would term 'catharsis' marks the technical individuation between film and viewer. The self-awareness that is gained in the new technical milieu of cinematic individuation also requires something akin to what Roland Barthes called a *punctum*, something within an image which pricks the viewer.[50] When this awareness is coupled with emotional catharsis, the potentialities of cinematic individuation are unleashed.

The camera cuts to a close-up of Ivan's face lit by strobes. It is clear by his wide grin that he is enjoying this. Then the music changes. It is a soothing shock; the music segues into a gentle piano melody. As the viewer simultaneously pays attention and relaxes, Ivan's face begins to change. The camera has rotated almost a full ninety-degrees, so his face is inverted. As the strobes and the music continue his unblinking eyes stare directly at the camera and his smile morphs into an expression of crestfallen uncertainty [fig. 2.10]. Whilst Ivan shows signs of trauma, this is also an awareness of the present moment. Schopenhauer suggests that 'happiness lies always in the future, or else in the past, and the present may be compared to a small dark cloud driven by the wind over the sunny plain; in front of and behind the cloud everything is bright, only it itself always casts a shadow. Consequently, the present is always inadequate, but the future is uncertain, and the past irrecoverable.'[51] I follow Henri Bergson in refuting the possibility of the 'present moment' as time is not reducible to single moments

[50] Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1980), 27. Barthes term is explicitly generated in order to discuss still photography, hence my reluctance to adopt it for cinema without qualification.
[51] Schopenhauer, *World as Will: II*, 573.

(Xeno's arrow paradox) but is instead a continuous duration (*durée*). *À propos* of this, Bergson outlines that our experience of what appears as the present is only ever the experience of the immediate past: 'When we think this present as going to be, it exists not yet; and when we think it as existing, it is already past.'[52] Instead, I view Schopenhauer's present as more akin to an attitude of self-reflection. The awareness of one's own being that exists from moment to moment, is as close to the present as one can approach—*hic et nunc* itself being experienceable. Hence, Ivan retains an aura of bliss. He expresses greater erotic pleasure than during any of his casual sex encounters.[53] It gestures toward a moment of revelation, which is both desperate and exhilarating. It allows both the character and the audience to prepare themselves for the imminent death, and in doing so, beckons in the duende—which values creativity and change at any cost. The drudgery of the film (the jerkily filmed panic of the agency offices and endless scenes of excess) prepare the viewer for these moments where Ivan is brought into terrible and beautiful clarity about his life (and his death). The viewer is brought with him into this realm of the duende—aided by the aesthetic strategies of the film: the music, the close-up, and the queasy effect of strobe lighting shot on high-definition digital film.

Finale (Liebestod)

Following his collapse at home, and subsequent emergency surgery, Ivan awakens in a hospital room. An instrumental of the 'Liebestod' aria from *Tristan and Isolde* begins to play on the score. These shots retain the *vérité* style of the film, but the voices of the nurses and doctors are indiscernible above the opera. Ivan drifts in and out of consciousness, his body is

[52] Bergson, *Matière et mémoire* [*Matter and Memory*, 1896], 193.
[53] In a later scene, Ivan listens enthusiastically to Schubert. His girlfriend rings and asks him if he's so out of breath due to masturbating. 'No, listening to music' he replies. Sex and music are compared, and the latter wins out.

connected to many tubes and machines. He refuses to communicate with anyone except for his nurse, who displays compassion by holding his hand and dealing with hospital administrators. After one such encounter they exchange smiles in shot-reverse-shot close-ups. He is unable to talk, and so is proffered paper and pen. With great effort, he scrawls ‘fuck God’ on the pad [fig. 2.11]. The camera cuts to a full shot of Ivan lying unconscious. The lamp creates a halo effect above his head. His right palm faces out and the poise resembles Christ iconography [fig. 2.12]. His discomfort continues but the film allows for some respite, cutting to a shot of a setting sun as a bird flies across the frame.

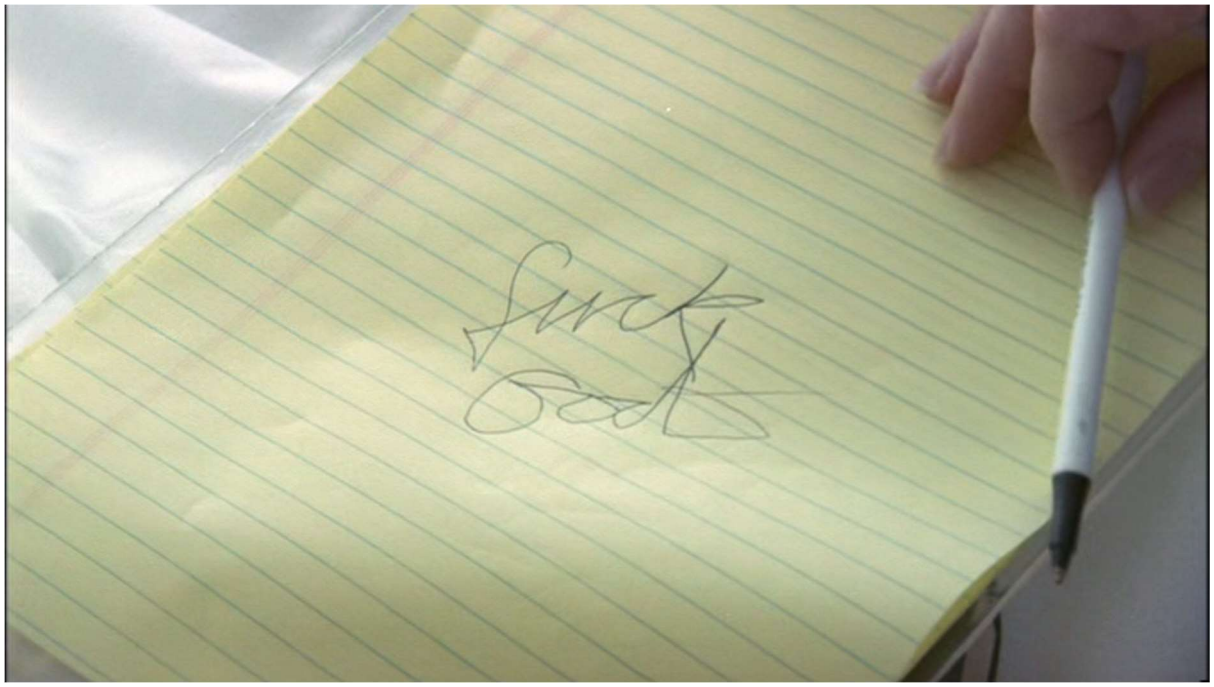

Figure 2.11. Ivan presents a Nietzschean view.

Figure 2.12. The framing in this shot evokes Christ-like parallels.

When the sequence returns to the hospital room the voice of the soprano singing the aria gradually fades in. As the music reaches the first of many climaxes, the shot from figure 2.7 fades in and out quickly. A close-up shows a smile flash across Ivan's face. The nurse shuts the blinds and mops his mouth and brow with a cloth. He reaches up to touch her shoulder, she holds his hand before embracing him. An extreme close-up shows her cradling his head. She kisses his forehead as the 'Liebestod' climaxes again. In a repeat of the prelude sequence, she leaves the room in slow motion, looking at Ivan one final time. She is briefly framed in profile by the window in the door [fig. 2.13]. Shot in a low-angle, Ivan leans back and shuts his eyes, presumably dying. The light fades as the 'Liebestod' reaches its final, sustained, chord. As the room darkens the light from the edges of the window forms two strong, glowing lines [fig. 2.14]. The screen fades to black as the 'Liebestod's' final note continues. The chord eventually dies away as the credits begin to roll. Notably, the first credit is for Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*.

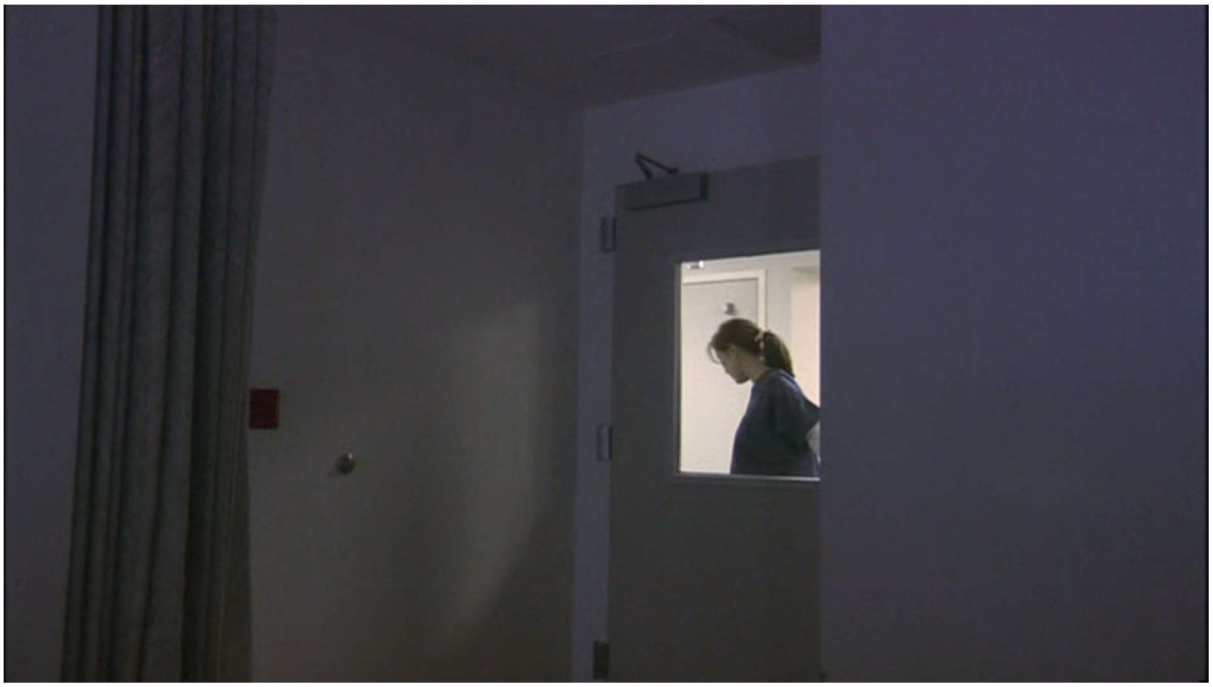

Figure 2.13. The nurse is framed like a cut-out in this shot.

Figure 2.14. The closed curtain and door create abstract white lines against the darkened room.

As the 'Liebestod' announces the beginning of this final sequence, it announces the beginning of the end (of the film, of the opera, and of life). It invokes García Lorca's duende

that 'does not come at all unless he sees that death is possible.'[54] We see Ivan has undergone a technical individuation that renders him part machine, hooked up to tubes as he is. These technical objects allow him to prolong existence just long enough for him to understand his death, to reconnect to his own being and to the world around him.

Having evoked Nietzsche by rejecting God [fig. 2.11.], Ivan is then shown in a pose of classical blessedness: palms outstretched and a halo above his head. This is not designed to propose Ivan as a saint or martyr. Rather, he should be seen in Nietzschean terms as a person realising their will to power. It is his new status as a technical assemblage that creates his holy effect, but it is an effect caused by the meeting of human and machine (also representing human ingenuity), and not by God. Deleuze writes about Nietzsche's views on death that 'we had to get to the last man, then to the man who wants to die, for negation *finally to turn against the reactive forces* and become an action that serves a higher affirmation.'[55] The deaths of Rose and Tolstoy's Ivans are not simply fables of human weakness and demise; they invite the viewer/reader to reflect on life and being via the negation of death. Thus, for the viewer/reader, the death of Ivan becomes a joyous event, just as the death of Isolde finally fulfils a sense of cathartic relief. I do not mean to suggest that it is only through watching *Ivansxtc* that the affects of Wagner and Tolstoy are drawn out. Rather, it is through the film's self-reflexive lens that the already reflexive qualities of those older works are brought to the fore. The film works here as a technical-milieu which *facilitates* the connections between various technical objects (the book, the opera, the film) and organic beings (the audience).

The montage intercuts between the setting sun [fig. 2.12], a close-up of Ivan, and the dazzling dawn light shining through foliage from the prelude montage [fig. 2.7]. During this sequence the vocal track of the 'Liebestod' fades in. This is a remix of the opening montage to create a different effect. The arrival of the soprano's voice also marks the arrival of the

[54] García Lorca, 'Theory of the Duende', 58.
[55] Deleuze, 'Nietzsche' (1965), 83.

duende, which, according to García Lorca, 'always means a radical change in forms. It brings to old planes unknown feelings of freshness, with the quality of something newly created, like a miracle, and it produces an almost religious enthusiasm.'[56] In a way, the preceding action of the film has depicted a subject living a grim life within 'old forms'. The ultimate release of the 'Liebestod' and the coming of the duende, are not merely cathartic, but also herald a change in forms—or at least a willingness to change. This is true for Ivan and, through cinematic individuation, is also possible for the audience.

The opening montage announced the spectre of death via the light of dawn, and the closing montage announces the prospect of life-in-death through the light of dusk. In figure 2.7, Ivan has finally discovered an image from his past (and our past, given that it occurred earlier in the film) that is 'worth a damn'. In his final 1973 Norton Lecture at Harvard University, Leonard Bernstein describes the 'Liebestod' as an ideal meeting of perfectly matching components. He then contrasts this to the neo-classicism of Igor Stravinsky, who deliberately sets the classical against contemporary styles to provoke a clash. With *Ivansxtc*, the classical (taken from Tolstoy and Wagner) is set against/perverted by an updated setting and jarring visual aesthetics (using prototype modern technology) to produce something which is both beautiful yet unsettling.

Nietzsche summarises *Tristan and Isolde* as 'a work upon which there lies the broken glance of a dying man with his insatiable sweet longing for the mysteries of night and death, far distant from life, which, as evil, deception and separation, shines with an uncanny ghostly morning brightness and distinctness'.[57] At the climax of *Ivansxtc* we are presented with a combination of both the phenomenal world of day (will) and the noumenal world of night (representation). As the blinds are drawn, Ivan's room (his world) is plunged into darkness. Two slivers of daylight remain [fig. 2.14], forming a partial right angle, the hint of an outline.

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[56] Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 53.
[57] Nietzsche, 'Wagner in Bayreuth', 232.

It is within this image that the two worlds (daylight and will; night and representation) are brought together. The spectator can now see that the two do not stand opposed, but always define each other. One always stands as the container for the other. The relationship is reciprocal not dialectical. In this way we might think of individuation as a flow from one state to another. Our encounters with representation (art, night, intense emotion) have a sensorial effect on us which drags us momentarily out of will (desire/daylight). Yet, our desires and concerns always drag us back into will, and the process begins again. What we must hope for is that the traces from our encounters with the world of representation enhance our existence within the world of will.

Ivan's final companion and comfort is his nurse. Here the audience is asked to behold Ivan rather than to identify with him. As a surrogate for the audience, the nurse pushed the viewer into a role of non-judgmental loving grace as she wordlessly caresses Ivan [fig. 2.15]. This is another Dionysian position. From the same essay on Nietzsche, Deleuze writes that 'Socrates judged and condemned life in the name of higher values, but Dionysus had the sense that life is not to be judged, that it is just enough, holy enough, in itself.'[58] Remembering that holiness, for Nietzsche, is not tied to religion but to that which allows humanity to fulfil its ultimate potential, we can see the nurse as an 'Übermensch'. She is a kind of 'last man', in that she is Ivan's last human encounter, who extends her being to him. In this sense, she is 'across man'. She demonstrates to the viewer that it is not enough to love yourself without loving the other, and vice-versa. Through our identification with her we are imbued with what Enrique Dussel called commiseration: 'love of the other as other'.[59] Figure 2.13 shows her briefly fixed in a portrait style frame, a fitting icon no doubt. However, as with Nietzsche's of the powers of the false, and her portrait/tableau is destroyed following a fleeting existence.

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[58] Deleuze, 'Nietzsche', 85.
[59] Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 64.

Figure 2.15. Ivan's last comfort.

These three close readings of *Ivansxtc* reveal the framework for its wider narrative and show how the film deploys its affects. As with *Tristan and Isolde*, both Tolstoy's novella and Rose's film perpetually defer action from their second to third acts. Both page and screen Ivans spend the middle third of their stories denying that anything is wrong, thus action is not permitted to progress. In *Ivansxtc*, the film can be explicated through the three scenes I have highlighted. The stakes of the film are set out in the overture-like opening montage which also serves to thaw out both the subject matter and the audience. What follows is a demonstration of Schopenhauer's world as will, Wagner's delayed resolution, and Nietzsche's Apollonian thought, up until the moment of realisation at the party. Retrospectively, this is the lining up of an aesthetic framework that allows for cinematic individuation. Ivan's revelation of self-reflection in the party scene aims to provoke a similar jolt to the viewer. From this point onwards, the film's narrative progresses with increasing velocity towards the denouement that the audience has been awaiting (having been shown the climax in the opening montage). The result of this is that Ivan and the viewer are then receptive to the Dionysian joy, or will to power, that is presented in the closing montage. If

the film has succeeded, then the attentive audience will experience a dark, duende-coercing, cinematic individuation.

Chapter 3 – Behind the Marketplace: Assemblage, Performance, and Schizoanalysis in *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire*

This is one of the unsettling things about a Lynch movie: You don't feel like you're entering into any of the standard unspoken and/or unconscious contracts you normally enter into with other kinds of movies. This is unsettling because in the absence of such an unconscious contract we lose some of the psychic protections we normally (and necessarily) bring to bear on a medium as powerful as film. That is, if we know on some level what a movie wants from us, we can erect certain internal defences that let us choose how much of ourselves we give away to it. The absence of point or recognizable agenda in Lynch's films, though, strips these subliminal defences and lets Lynch get inside your head in a way movies normally don't. This is why his best films' effects are often so emotional and nightmarish (We're defenceless in our dreams too). – David Foster Wallace[1]

Introduction

This chapter continues the exploration of the aesthetic qualities of cinematic individuation that I laid out in Chapter 2. I evolve this approach to begin thinking further about the sociopolitical implications and possibilities of the concept. I demonstrate how this works by conducting close readings of David Lynch's two meta-Hollywood films: *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *Inland Empire* (2006). These films arguably distil all the qualities found in the case studies from the other chapters. They contain metafictional films-within-films that synthesise with the central narratives like *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* and *Adaptation*; they manipulate sounds and images to create affects akin to *Ivansxtc*; and they deploy performance as a metaphysical evaluation as in *Somewhere* and *Knight of Cups*. As with *Ivansxtc*, I view these films as adhering to the neo-romanticism—a kind of postmodern artistic practice that appeals to emotions over rationality—which I explicate more fully in Chapter 4 and the 'Conclusion' chapter.

My reading of *Mulholland Drive* uses aesthetics as a starting point before segueing into a discourse using Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's 'schizoanalysis'. Schizoanalysis is a political form of interpretation that seeks out breakdowns in established forms with the aim

[1] Wallace, 'David Lynch Keeps His head' [1996], 170 – 1.

of reforming said structures into progressive new configurations. I draw upon Judith Butler's theory of performed subjectivity and discuss how this is manifested literally in a film that showcases (and troubles) the idea of performance. *Inland Empire* pushes these ideas even further than *Mulholland Drive*. The breakdown of narrative cohesion (via schizoanalysis) results in a sustained investigation into performance and aesthetic formal play. In a gesture towards resolution, Lynch creates varying assemblages of characters that demonstrate the sociopolitical strength that Butler proposes is innate in such groupings.

Chapter 2 engaged with a lineage of German romantic philosophy (Schopenhauer, Wagner, and Nietzsche) to explain certain aesthetic conditions of cinematic individuation. Writing on the Club Silencio sequence in *Mulholland Drive* (also addressed in this chapter), Robert Sinnerbrink has followed a similar trail, resulting in something akin to cinematic individuation that he terms 'cinematic romanticism'.[2] He remarks that '*Mulholland Drive* fulfils what the German romantics called for in their philosophy of art: a work that would overcome the divisions between universal and particular, reason and feeling, thereby expressing the utopian image of a unity of thought and imagination, of conscious and unconscious expression.'[3] The affective and aesthetic aims of cinematic romanticism are comparable with cinematic individuation (simultaneous cerebral distancing and phenomenological attraction facilitated by technical individuation with the technical assemblage that is a film) in that it 'combines cinematic meta-reflection with sensuous immediacy, an affective power to evoke mood and sensation with aesthetic figures expressing abstract thought.'[4] Sinnerbrink's concept is ultimately no different from Nietzsche's axis of Apollonian (rational-thinking) and Dionysian (chaotic-feeling) thought. Nietzsche believed that in certain works, such as Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* (see Chapter 2), the two could

[2] Sinnerbrink, 'Silencio: *Mulholland Drive* as Cinematic Romanticism', 77.
[3] Sinnerbrink, 77.
[4] Sinnerbrink, 79.

work together to evoke their contrasting effects all at once in the spectator. Cinematic individuation is inherently reliant upon the technical object that is the film. It is only through social individuation with this technical object that the relationship between the organic being (viewer) and the world can be reconfigured from its nineteenth-century ideation.

I begin this chapter with some background information on *Mulholland Drive* and its creator David Lynch. Before launching into close readings of the film, I lay out the theories used in this chapter: Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis, and Judith Butler's assemblages and performance. I then analyse several key scenes from *Mulholland Drive*: the opening dance sequence, the audition for the film-within-a-film scene (contrasted with the famous 'Club Silencio' sequence), and the end/death sequence. After providing the context and background of *Inland Empire*, I then analyse instances of schizoanalysis, performance, and assemblage within the film.

Hollywood, California: 2001

Having received the *Prix de la mise en scène* (best director) award at the Cannes Film Festival in April 2001, *Mulholland Drive* opened in US cinemas amidst the turmoil following the terrorist attacks on 11 September.[5] The film received critical acclaim, and garnered Lynch an Academy Award nomination for directing. Its reputation has grown consistently over time. In *Sight and Sound*'s 2012 critics' poll of the greatest films ever made (conducted every ten years), *Mulholland Drive* ranked twenty-eighth and, alongside *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-wai, 2000), was one of only two films from the twenty-first century included in the top fifty. In the directors' poll (conducted simultaneously), the film ranked seventy-fifth and, alongside *In the Mood for Love*, *Caché* [*Hidden*] (Michael Haneke, 2005), and *There Will Be*

[5] David Lynch shared the award with Joel Coen for *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001).

Blood (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2007), was one of only four films from the twenty-first century in the top hundred.[6] In 2016, *Mulholland Drive* came in first place in a BBC poll of the greatest films of the twenty-first century thus far.[7]

Following several early experimental shorts, Lynch produced the surrealist feature film *Eraserhead* (1977). Surrealism and expressionism have remained aesthetic and ideological touchstones in his work, particularly in films such as *The Elephant Man* (1980), *Blue Velvet* (1986), *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), *Lost Highway* (1997), and, of course, both the films discussed in this chapter. After the turn of the millennium, Lynch began experimenting with new formats such as the animated series *DumbLand* (2002), and the web series *Rabbits* (2002), some of which is reused in *Inland Empire*. *Inland Empire* remains Lynch's last feature film—although Lynch has described *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017) as 'a feature film in eighteen parts'.[8] In recent years, he has focused on his painting (as documented in Jon Nguyen, Olivia Neergaard-Holm, and Rick Barnes' 2016 film *David Lynch: The Art Life*), several digital short films, and has released two solo albums: *Crazy Clown Time* (2011) and *The Big Dream* (2013). The 2017 revival of *Twin Peaks* (1991 – 92) marked his return to commercial screen media.

Co-created with Mark Frost, *Twin Peaks* was a surprisingly popular ratings hit in the early 1990s. Whilst it initially appeared to be a compelling backwoods murder mystery, the show slowly revealed itself as an absurdist nightmare. As the narrative became evermore surreal, the show's viewership sharply declined. This resulted in the show being cancelled after its second season. Lynch enjoyed his experience with television, and appreciated the time and space it allowed for the exploration of settings, themes, locations, and characters.

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[6] Full results are available at http://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/sightandsoundpoll2012.
[7] The voting poll consisted of 177 film critics from around the world. *Adaptation* and Somewhere received three votes, *Inland Empire* and *Knight of Cups* received one, and *Ivansxtc* received none. *Mulholland Drive*'s winning total was forty-seven. Full results are available at http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20160819-the-21st-centurys-100-greatest-films.
[8] Franich, 'Is *Twin Peaks* a Movie?'.

This resulted in Lynch writing and filming a ninety-minute pilot in 1999 for a new show called *Mulholland Drive*. ABC objected to the nonlinearity of the pilot (and to excessive cigarette smoking) and passed on the series.[9] With $7 million of funding acquired from French studio Canal+ (a subsidiary of the monolithic multinational media conglomerate Vivendi), Lynch rewrote the script and filmed extra scenes in 2000. Following the positive Cannes reception, Universal acquired distribution rights.

Mulholland Drive opens with footage of Betty Elms (Naomi Watts) winning a dance contest. The action switches to a dark Mulholland Drive in Hollywood Hills. In the backseat of a limousine a dark-haired woman (Laura Harring) is about to become the victim of a hitman. Before she can be killed, some drunk street racers crash into the limo. The woman is the sole survivor, and staggers down the hills onto Sunset Boulevard. She sneaks into an unoccupied apartment and falls asleep. Betty arrives at Los Angeles International Airport [LAX]. She waves goodbye to an elderly couple whom she met on the flight. They wish her luck pursuing her dream of becoming an actress and enter a taxi. Once in the taxi they erupt into manic and disturbing laughter. Betty arrives at an apartment belonging to her aunt. There she is surprised to encounter the dark-haired women who is evidently suffering from amnesia. Together they endeavour to discover the woman's identity. Inspired by a poster of Rita Hayworth in *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946) hanging on her aunt's wall, Betty decides to call the woman Rita. In Rita's purse, they discover a blue key and a large sum of money. The action switches to a diner where Dan (Patrick Fischer) tells a friend (Michael Cooke) about a dream he had in which he encountered a terrifying figure behind the same diner. They go into the alley that runs behind the diner and find a grotesque bum (Bonnie Aarons) whose appearance causes Dan to collapse in shock. This is the first of many explorations, or depictions, of what lies *behind* or *outside* or *between* locations, sets, and the

[9] See Paul A. Woods, *Weirdsville USA: The Obsessive Universe of David Lynch* (London: Plexus, 2000), 213.

film frame itself. Focusing on the dichotomy between glossy Hollywood story and grimy, abject 'behind-the-scenes' space is a fruitful way of approaching this film. Furthermore, these horrific encounters with the bum jolt the narrative into new states. It is as if the breakdowns caused by the bum's appearance force the film to reconfigure into these further stages.

The film then introduces a further plotline. Film director Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux) is under pressure from the mobster financial backers of his new film, *The Sylvia North Story*, to cast an unknown actress called Camilla Rhodes (Melissa George) in the lead role. The mob is under the direction of the mysterious Mr. Roque (Michael J. Anderson), a well-dressed, diminutive man who is always shown sitting in a red-curtained windowless room, containing only a chair and a telephone—another no-space within the film.[10] Adam discovers that his wife is having an affair and that the gangsters have emptied his bank account. In desperation, he agrees to meet a strange man referred to as 'The Cowboy' (Monty Montgomery). The Cowboy communicates in a series of elusive 'clues' and threats that point towards Adam's obligation to cast Camilla Rhodes. In a scene that is seemingly unconnected to the main narrative, a hitman called Joe (Mark Pellegrino) bungles a job resulting in three deaths.

At a film studio, Betty gives a powerful audition for a terrible soap opera that stuns the watching production team. A casting agent takes her to the lot where Adam is auditioning for *The Sylvia North Story*. Adam capitulates to the demands of Mr. Roque and casts Camilla Rhodes. Adam and Betty's eyes meet across the set and both look stunned. Betty rushes away before Adam can approach her.

Betty and Rita go to the apartment of a woman named Diane Selwyn. When nobody answers the door, they break in to discover squalid lodgings and a decomposing corpse: a sunny

[10] These liminal spaces in Lynch's work might be aligned with Deleuze's 'any-space-whatsoever … where the modern affects of fear, detachment, but also freshness, extreme speed and interminable waiting were developing.' In *Cinema I*, 135.

LA exterior is juxtaposed with an abject mausoleum. Rita takes Betty to Club Silencio, a late-night cabaret theatre and liminal threshold *par excellence*. During a surreal performance, Rita looks inside her bag to discover a blue box. Upon returning to the apartment, Betty disappears. Rita opens the box with the blue key. The box falls to the ground.

Diane Selwyn (Naomi Watts) wakes up in her apartment. Her appearance is identical to Betty's. Several scenes show that she is becoming increasingly depressed due to her failed acting career and rocky love affair with actress Camilla Rhodes (Laura Harring), who resembles Rita. Camilla invites Diane to a party at Adam's house where it becomes clear that Camilla has taken another lover and is possibly planning to marry Adam. Diane employs the hitman from earlier to kill Camilla. He tells her that she will find a blue key once the deed is done. Later, Diane discovers the blue key on her living room table. She becomes engulfed by hallucinations involving the elderly couple from the start of the film. Hysterical, she runs to the bedroom and shoots herself. The film ends back in Club Silencio.

Such is *Mulholland Drive*'s critical status that it is not surprising that it has garnered a sizeable cachet of academic attention. Much writing on the film attempts to unravel its complex narrative web and construct a coherent meaning, often through a psychoanalytic filter. I view this as an inherently futile endeavour that contradicts Lynch's surrealist methods. Todd McGowan uses a Lacanian approach to divide the two distinct halves of the film into narratives of fantasy and desire (the Real). He proposes that the two halves should not be seen as contrasting as, in Lacanian theory, fantasy should not be dialectically opposed to reality (desire) as it is the very means by which we structure, support, and experience reality. He argues that as Hollywood is predicated upon foundations of fantasy, *Mulholland Drive* can be seen as a criticism of our mistrust of fantasy, and a call 'to fully immerse

ourselves in fantasy, to abandon ourselves to its logic. Only in this way can we experience fantasy's privileged path to the Real!'[11]

Jay R. Lentzner and Donald R. Ross follow a popular line of interpretation that posits the 'Betty' section of the film to be a dream or fantasy escape from the grim 'reality' of the 'Diane' ending. Lentzner and Ross describe the dream as a collage of homages to other Hollywood films that 'invites a free association to popular culture'.[12] Debra Shostak adheres to this view, adding that a fantasy predicated on Hollywood genres is inevitably doomed: 'By the logic of the genres she appropriates, her death becomes inevitable.'[13] Novelist Don DeLillo wrote on several occasions that plots (those of literature and film, but also schemes and conspiracies) have a tendency to end in death.[14] Once we place something into a narrative (plot) we condemn it to time and thus we give it a terminal point. Also, DeLillo's suggestion is that we construct narratives in art in order to build the illusion that we can contain death (as with Wes Craven and Freddy Krueger in Chapter 1) within stories.

Moving from concerns over reality to those of temporality, Eric G. Wilson describes *Mulholland Drive* as positing 'the possible unreality of the empirical' and proposes that the un-temporal dreamworld of Betty might be more worthwhile, despite its 'apocalyptic' forebodings.[15] It should be said that the dream must have *some* semblance of temporal order, otherwise it would not be describable in linear terms. N. Katherine Hayles and Nicholas Gessler uphold this caveat, writing that the dream structure, whilst disorientating, is ultimately legible. They move away from a clear dichotomy of dream vs. reality to propose a subjective sense of reality that is a patchwork of dream, waking life, hallucination, fantasy,

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[11] McGowan, 'Lost on Mulholland Drive: Navigating David Lynch's Panegyric to Hollywood', 86.
[12] Lentzner and Ross, 'The Dreams That Blister Sleep: Latent Content and Cinematic Form in Mulholland Drive', 107.
[13] Shostak, 'Dancing in Hollywood's Blue Box: Genre and Screen Memories in *Mulholland Drive*', 13.
[14] 'All plots tend to move deathward. This is the nature of plots.' in DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985) (London: Picador, 2012), 30; 'There is a tendency of plots to move towards death…. A narrative plot is no less than a conspiracy of armed men.' In DeLillo, *Libra* [1988], 221.
[15] Wilson, *The Strange World of David Lynch: Transcendental Irony from* Eraserhead *to* Mulholland DR., 141.

and so on: 'In the slipstream, simulation and real life, science fiction and everyday reality, merge to form an ontologically unstable amalgam that is, these films suggest, finally the only reality we can call our own.'[16]

Anna Powell conducts a Deleuzian reading of the film. Unlike Wilson, she does not go as far as to say that time is obliterated. Rather, she expounds the inextricable relationship between fantasy and reality as forming a time-image where past and present become indiscernible causing a crisis of recollection. She suggests that 'Diane's reveries *in extremis* have accessed an any-space-whatever of duration, and via this they work to suspend the viewer's customary temporal schema.'[17] Thus, our sense of not being able to unravel and sufficiently interpret the structure and symbolism of the film is due to our own malfunctioning memory. We cannot grasp a coherent understanding of the film's temporality when our own ontological grounding is thus disturbed. One particularly interesting approach from Ronie Parciack explores Lynch's incorporation of Indian philosophy in his films (Lynch has previously spoken about his interest in Eastern thought systems). Parciack disregards the debate over what is dream and what is real—suggesting that, in Lynch's films, all characters exist on the same ontological level. He calls for critical approaches to *Mulholland Drive* to change, as 'the question can no longer be "what really exists (in the film)?" but rather, "Is our comprehension (of the film) valid or invalid?" This constitutes a shift from the ontological to the epistemological.'[18] This chapter is not concerned at all with the realities of Diane and Betty—and is purely interested in how we experience, process, and interact with the film. Parciack's distinction of validity perhaps corresponds to the intensity of our experience

[16] Hayles and Gessler, 'The Slipstream of Mixed Reality: Unstable Ontologies and Semiotic Markers in *The Thirteenth Floor*, *Dark City*, and *Mulholland Drive*', 484.
[17] Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film*, 56.
[18] Parciack, 'The world as Illusion: Rediscovering *Mulholland Dr.* and *Lost Highway* through Indian Philosophy',82.

watching the film—if it overwhelms me then perhaps that *experience* makes for a 'valid comprehension'.

As well as many scholars, the vast commentariat of the internet is mainly invested in attempting to straighten out the convoluted and disorientating narrative structure of *Mulholland Drive*, and various fan sites and film blogs have been dedicated to 'solving' the film. Figure 3.1 shows one website's plot table that provides a chronological ordering of the 'real' events occurring within the film:

Chronological Order	Event
1.	Jitterbug contest
2.	Diane moves to L.A., meets Camilla on the auditions of the Sylvia North Story, they possibly enter into a lesbian love relationship
3.	Camilla is directed by 'him' (movie set with Adam/Camilla kissing)
4.	Camilla splits up with Diane because of 'him' (couch scene)
5.	Diane evicts Camilla (doorway scene)
6.	Diane bitterly masturbates
7.	Diane's limo ride / the dinner scene
8.	Winkie's scene (with hitman)
9.	Diane hides/disappears a couple of days
10.	Diane falls asleep (after hit ordered and blue key discovered)
11.	Diane's dream (dominant section of the film)
12.	Diane wakes up / notices blue key (murder completed) / briefly hallucinates about Camilla's coming back
13.	Diane sits on the couch and remembers
14.	Night falls / Diane's suicide (while, presumably, police pounds her door)
15.	"Silencio!" (blue-haired lady)

Figure 3.1.[19] A table showing the 'straightened' narrative of *Mulholland Drive*. The main 'dream' section of the film is reduced to a single plot 'step'.

[19] Taken from the *Mulholland Drive* fan site http://www.mulholland-drive.net/studies/timeline.htm [accessed 23/06/2018].

But what is the point of making such a surreal and fragmented film sensible? It speaks to a human need to explain the unknown—the same irritation felt at the ungraspable crossword clue or unrevealed magic trick. Yet, at the same time, we seek out the crossword puzzle, we indulge the magician's infuriating show, and we continue to watch (and to lavish praise upon) films like *Mulholland Drive*. My instinct is that complex, or 'puzzle', films that can ultimately be unravelled receive greater acclaim than those that cannot, or at least not to a sufficient extent.[20] Hence, in part, why *Mulholland Drive* is comparatively more popular than *Inland Empire*. If this is the case, then we are seeking out films that disorientate our ontological groundings and unsettle our subjectivity only to tame and contain them. What is the use of deindividuation if one simply reindividuates back to what one was before? My argument here is that we should watch these films not in order to civilise them, but to disrupt ourselves. To welcome and indulge in the potentials and affects arising from confusion and sensory seduction and assault—rather than trying to seamlessly solve the puzzle.

Schizoanalysis

Before I conduct close readings of key scenes in *Mulholland Drive*, I will outline the theoretical concepts I am deploying, starting with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's schizoanalysis. As I have explained—and will reiterate—I see little value in providing an

[20] See Warren Buckland's edited collections *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) and *Hollywood Puzzle Films* (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2014) for a variety of scholarly analyses of puzzle films including several explanatory chapters. In the earlier work, cf. Warren Buckland, 'Making Sense of *Lost Highway*' (13 – 41); Stefano Ghislotti, 'Narrative Comprehension Made Difficult: Film Form and Mnemonic Devices in *Memento*' (87 – 106); and Eleftheria Thanouli, 'Looking for Access in Narrative Complexity. The New and the Old in *Oldboy*' (217 – 232). In the later work, cf. Geoff King, 'Unraveling the Puzzle of *Inception*' (57 – 71); and Elliot Panek, '"Show, don't Tell": Considering the Utility of Diagrams as a Tool for Understanding Complex Narratives' (72 – 88). William Brown's chapter in the second collection, 'Complexity and Simplicity in *Inception* and *Five Dedicated to Ozu*' (125 – 141), points out audiences desire to reduce complex films to easily legible readings, and to translate 'simple' [arthouse] films into profound artworks: 'a visually complex film like *Inception* leads to a simple/poor variety of responses, while a visually simple film like *Five* leads to a complex variety of responses.' (136).

interpretation of every oblique symbol, or 'un-kinking' the scrambled narratives of Lynch's work.[21] And I do not merely mean to use his films as a kind of counter-key for explaining Deleuze and Guattari's challenging writing and ideas. What schizoanalysis provides is a systematic way of thinking about Lynch's particular brand of surrealism without the need to reduce his films to something easily summarised—which would diffuse their potential affects.

To fully comprehend Deleuze and Guattari's concept of schizoanalysis, it is important to grasp that their approach to psychoanalysis differs from that of Freud and Lacan's. Their understanding of desire is a significant departure from Freud's equation that desire is equivalent to lack, or—looking back to Chapter 2—Arthur Schopenhauer's pessimistic description of the world being a product of unsatisfiable desire (will). Instead, Deleuze and Guattari view desire as a productive force, one which can create.[22] They propose that 'if desire produces, its product is real. If desire is productive, it can be productive only in the real world and produce only reality.… Desire does not lack anything.'[23] 'Reality' and 'the real world' are slippery terms for Deleuze and Guattari. As they avoid hierarchical judgements of ontological levels, the world created by desire (which Schopenhauer outlined) is as real as any other level of reality. Nor do they see the unconscious in Freudian terms: as a repository of fragments of subjectivity and deep subliminal urges. Rather, 'the unconscious does not speak, it engineers. It is not expressive or representative, but productive … a desiring-machine that functions within the social machine, an investment of the social machine by desire.'[24] It is through the liberation of desire that what Deleuze and Guattari call

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[21] Like Hermann Melville, whose 'Gold Doubloon' in *Moby Dick* meant something completely different to each sailor on the Pequod, or Susan Sontag, I am 'against interpretation'.
[22] Deleuze and Guattari take influence from Spinoza who defines desire as 'appetite together with consciousness of the appetite', in Spinoza, *Ethica* [*Ethics*, 1677], 76.
[23] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 39.
[24] Deleuze and Guattari, 209. For more on the metaphor of unconscious as machine see Félix Guattari, *The Machinic Unconscious*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2011). The *ālāya-vijñāna* [storehouse] consciousness in *Yogācāra* Buddhism conceives of the unconscious as containing seeds of potential formed by life events that can be activated to produce actualised affects.

'the social machine' (which can be thought of as the socius—the coded and culturally determined social order) can become a productive body, rather than an inert body controlled by global capitalism. The 'social' descriptor suggests that productivity that is liberated from global capitalism relies on the social individuations that can only be achieved within an assemblage. In this sense: capitalism = solipsism, and productive desire = a kind of collaborative openness.

The meat of the theory aims 'to analyse the specific nature of the libidinal investments in the economic and political spheres and thereby to show how, in the subject who desires, desire can be made to desire its own repression—whence the role of the death instinct in the circuit connecting desire to the social sphere.'[25] Thus, desire is not inherently positive. It can be channelled by forces that are both repressive and liberating. In contemporary society, Deleuze and Guattari argue, the flows of desire are structured by capitalism. They deploy the figure of the 'body without organs' [BwO] to evoke this. The BwO is an entropic state of zero intensity (as nothing enters in or out of the body). A pessimistic example of the BwO are the mundane and stultifying routines instilled into our lives by existing in societies predicated on consumerism and controlled by algorithms. But this myopic state also contains within it the potential for deterritorialisation (it is effectively a blank slate). It is better to think of an egg—nothing enters in or out but potential being is incubated within. Deleuze and Guattari describe the BwO as containing 'nothing but bands of intensity, potentials, thresholds. A harrowing, emotionally overwhelming experience, which brings the schizo as close as possible to matter'.[26]

This overwhelming experience is what Deleuze and Guattari propose that the schizoanalysis of art aims to invoke. Artists engaged in such a task 'overcome a limit, they shatter a wall, the capitalist barrier. And of course they fail to complete the process, they

[25] Deleuze and Guattari, 127.
[26] Deleuze and Guattari, 31 – 32.

never cease failing to do so.'[27] Schizoanalysis evades the Lacanian encounter with the Real that engenders a breakdown of the symbolic order. Rather, the breakdown is in fact a breakthrough, into new formations of power and subjectivity. But this takes the guise of a perpetual 'failure'—rather, as the goal of schizoanalysis is to constantly generate new horizons, it is deemed successful by way of being ever incomplete.

Deleuze and Guattari allow for a successful breakthrough (albeit a qualified success given that it only leads back to the start). They contest that schizoanalysis:

> either passes through the wall, opening onto the molecular elements where it becomes in actual fact what it was from the start: the schizophrenic process, the pure schizophrenic process of deterritorialisation. Or it strikes the wall, rebounds off it, and falls back into the most miserably arranged territorialities of the modern world as simulacra of the preceding planes.[28]

Because a reterritorialization only exists as a theoretical proposal (until it happens), the observable attempts to break through the barrier are always failed attempts—remember that in Deleuze and Guattari's backwards language, 'failure' equates to success. Films such as *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire* thus represent Deleuze and Guattari's simulacra (copies of 'reality'). As I explicated in Chapter 1, simulacra are positive figures for Deleuze. They disturb the notion of a fixed (and therefore dead) reality. Each time a person is exposed to such 'failures', they are exposed to schizoanalysis. Each 'failure' is a tiny deviation from the world and an imperceptible move away from a hegemonic order. If schizoanalysis has a key aim it is that it 'rejects any idea of pretraced destiny'; a changing world is always favoured over a stable one.[29]

How does this template fit when laid over Lynch's films? Deleuze and Guattari supply the following description of one of their favourite 'schizo artists', Marcel Proust, and his seven volume novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* [*In Search of Lost Time*, 1913-1927]:

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[27] Deleuze and Guattari, 158.
[28] Deleuze and Guattari, 322.
[29] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 12.

> all the parts are produced as asymmetrical sections, paths that suddenly come to an end, hermetically sealed boxes, noncommunicating vessels, watertight compartments, in which there are gaps even between things that are contiguous, gaps that are affirmations, pieces of a puzzle belonging not to any one puzzle but to many, pieces assembled by forcing them into certain places where they may or may not belong, their unmatched edges violently bent out of shape, forcibly made to fit together, to interlock, with a number of pieces always left over. It is a schizoid work par excellence.[30]

A synopsis of Proust's work would take up too much space, but running themes include the loss of meaning (and, of course, time) in *fin de siècle* France, the decay of the aristocracy, and the arbitrary nature of signs—which can be used, but only to create arbitrary meanings. It is precisely these similar blind allies, red herrings, and unresolved narrative pathways in Lynch that cause some viewers to react strongly against his films (and indeed also why he has garnered a loyal following), and why certain academic writing is so obsessed with 'solving' the puzzle (a kind of modernist exercise whereby fragments might be reconstituted to form some higher meaning). This desire for meaning is not productive. It is the desire for the staid world of the body without organs. In schizoanalytic terms, it is the desire *for the desire to produce* meaning that is productive. What does the film mean to you when you refuse to make it meaningful?

By setting *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire* in Hollywood, Lynch demonstrates that the potential for destabilising schizoanalysis lies directly within a site of global capitalism (Hollywood). Deleuze and Guattari borrow Michel Carrouges' idea of 'celibate machines' (a better translation would be 'bachelor machines')—originally used by Carrouges to compare the inscrutable and complex machine in Marcel Duchamp's *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* [*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, 1915-1923] with the torture machine in Franz Kafka's *In der Strafkolonie* [*In the Penal Colony*, 1919].[31] Both are auto-erotic in that they operate internally without external stimulus. Deleuze and

[30] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 57.
[31] See Michel Carrouges, *Les machines célibataires* (Paris: Arcanes, 1954).

Guattari floridly inform that 'the celibate machine first of all reveals the existence of a much older paranoiac machine, with its tortures, its dark shadows, its ancient law.… Even when it tortures or kills, it manifests something new and different'.[32] The celibate machine stands for the body without organs that is Hollywood (desiring to fuck itself perhaps), and the paranoiac machine represents Lynch's films. They confront the viewer with unsettling, or downright destructive, aesthetic experiences that nevertheless allow for the creation of something new.

The onslaught of tantalising symbols in *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire* are not riddles to be solved, but are evidence of the commencement of productive desire: 'symbols and fetishes are manifestations of desiring-machines.'[33] Martha Nochimson writes that the stories of both films are 'derived from numerous entangled fragments. The bigger picture will be an aggregate of what is known combined with the gaps between the pieces displayed for us—bits of information and the void between these bits.'[34] This is a more productive approach to such fragmented material but Nochimson still proposes a viable 'bigger picture'. I think that a coherent whole is neither necessary nor desired.

Performers Assemble!

Both *Mulholland Drive* and (as I shall demonstrate) *Inland Empire* foreground performativity—they are, after all, films about actors. They both feature frequent and prominent musical performances, many of which are addressed in depth later in this chapter. There is a consistent engagement with artificial performance via mime and lip-synced singing. Performers in *Mulholland Drive* are usually soloists whilst in *Inland Empire* they form into scrappy yet enthusiastic dance troupes. I turn here to Judith Butler's work on

[32] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 30.
[33] Deleuze and Guattari, 213.
[34] Nochimson, *David Lynch Swerves: Uncertainty from* Lost Highway *to* Inland Empire, 127.

performance and assemblage in order to show how the affective properties of performance increase within group settings. Whilst solo performances (although they are never truly solo) can be extremely expressive, highly artistic, or acts of protest, to become political acts they must ultimately create, or respond to, a collaborative space. A space within which an assemblage—and thus social individuations—can form.

It is within an assemblage of performers that performativity takes on a political dimension. It can only be political when it replies to, plays off, resists, and affects other performing subjects. In fact, if performance is always defined by what the actor is performing with, or against, performance is inherently collective and plural. Even a 'solo' performance references a larger set, conspicuous by its absence, or involves a passive audience, or at the very least interacts with environmental objects and terrain. Butler concurs that 'performativity is thus not a singular "act", for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms'.[35] Here, Butler shows that as each act is predicated on repeating or challenging previous performances, now accepted as social norms, performativity never occurs in a vacuum, but is always in dialogue with the current sociopolitical milieu. Butler also accounts for divisions and alliances within a single subject.[36] For her, the start of collective action starts with reconciliation of a single person's internal differences.

Much of Butler's theory of assemblage examines gatherings in public spaces, primarily city streets and squares. Such an assemblage 'delivers a bodily demand for a more liveable set of economic, sociopolitical conditions no longer afflicted by induced forms of precarity.'[37] Not only do these publicly visible assemblages encompass the geography of a society (which is harder to ignore than its occupants) but they serve the purpose of 'asserting

[35] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 12. See this book and *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) (New York: Routledge, 1999), for Butler's theory of performance as it pertains particularly to gender and sexuality.
[36] Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 68.
[37] Butler, 11.

that a group of people is still existing'.[38] By association by proximity, and through co-option as ad hoc stage sets, the bodies that perform become indelibly connected to the infrastructure that surrounds them. This is not only an effort to gain greater visibility, but also has the effect of turning physical space political and connecting the performers to a particular sociopolitical environment. Butler claims that 'collective actions collect the space itself, gather the pavements, and animate and organise the architecture.'[39] Two famous contemporary examples are Tahrir Square in Cairo and the Wall Street financial district in New York. The former has come not to simply represent mass demonstrations and regime change in Egypt, but also regime chance in the whole region during the Arab Spring (2010-2012); the latter is in the curious position of representing both a nexus of global capitalism and also the protestations of that system due to the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011.

These collective performances may protest against existing power structures, but they nonetheless remain inside, and are governed by, them. Much like Giorgio Agamben's bare life (whereby those stripped of rights, power, and ultimately humanity, are still controlled and exploited by sovereign authority), Butler states that 'to be outside established and legitimate political structures is still to be saturated in power relations.'[40] Butler diverges from Agamben by refuting his conception of the excluded as having the status: bare life (although I demonstrate some of the sociopolitical potentials of bare life in Chapter 4). For her, the fact that the excluded are still enmeshed in power structures gives them a position of political agency. This position is a type of abjection: both excluded and included. Whilst a state of abjection is uncomfortable for any being, it also contains within it the capacity for resistance. The abject figure does not reside completely within the grip of power structures, nor wholly

[38] Butler, 18.
[39] Butler, 71.
[40] Butler, 80.

without. They can thus potentially undermine a ruling power from within as they are not fully controlled or controllable.

'Must we be overwhelmed in order to have motive for action?' asks Butler.[41] In Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire* the answer is: we must be overwhelmed in order to have *the capacity* for action. Action meaning the capacity for performance, and an openness to the idea of assemblage. With reference to Spinoza and Deleuze, Butler writes that bodies 'open onto the body of another, or a set of others, and for this reason bodies are not self-enclosed kinds of entities. They are always in some sense outside themselves.'[42] In Lynch's films, characters (and the audience) become overwhelmed and broken down physically and psychologically. They enter a state of disintegration. This state is, as Butler says, 'outside themselves', and is thus an abject state. The experience of being in this state might be miserable, but it is here that Lynch's characters can connect to other beings (and objects) and create new identities and new environments: ultimately entirely new ways of being. Whilst such proposed worlds may be contained to Lynch's surreal onscreen creations, they act as manifestos of protest. They are comparable to how Butler views public assemblages of bodies: as a 'minor way to enact the world we wish to see, or to refuse the one that is doing us in.'[43] And if they experience cinematic individuation, then the viewer becomes invested in these new configurations, and becomes a symbolic bearer of such content when they leave the cinema (or room, or device) and re-emerge into the world.

[41] Butler, 102.
[42] Butler, 149.
[43] Butler, 153.

Of Bugs and Monsters

Before I conduct my close analyses of *Mulholland Drive*'s various mime performances I will address its most obvious displays of assemblage and abjection. As previously mentioned, the film begins with a dance sequence. Following the opening credits and accompanied by Angelo Badalamenti's ominous score of droning bass tones, silhouettes moving in slow-motion fill the screen and rhythmic piano chords are heard on the soundtrack. A jive drum beat kicks in and the screen is abruptly filled with dancing figures [fig. 3.2]. The abstract collage of (what is later revealed to be a jitterbug dance contest) the sequence includes four dancing couples who are duplicated and placed against a purple travelling matte (blue screen) and their own enlarged silhouettes. The dancers, the purple screen, and the silhouettes form three separate planes of image, although the planes shift from foreground to background. Through fades and superimpositions, the dancers are made ethereal presences that materialise, collide, and vanish continually. The music remains consistent, driven by urgent horn blasts. A fourth layer is added in the foreground: an out of focus, limpid and over saturated close-up of Betty and the sinister elderly couple beaming with delight. This layer disappears, and Betty's face alone emerges smiling (for she has won the contest). The three-shot close-up of Betty and the old couple again appears to obscure her. Finally, the dance collage fades out, the elderly couple fade in, and the screen cuts to a shot of Diane Selwyn asleep in her bed.

Figure 3.2. The collage of dancers features three overlapping image planes: the figures, the silhouettes, and the purple screen.

The doubling, tripling, and quadrupling of figures resonates thematically with the main narrative of *Mulholland Drive* in that there are many dual roles, and several characters are played by two actors. One reading of this dance sequence is that it celebrates these shifting identities. Dance is perhaps the most overtly 'performed' type of performance, in that the constant physical shifts highlight the individual aspects of each gesture, position, or movement. Dance shows how the performance of identity is a constant endeavour, and that a performance can be deconstructed into countless individual moments. Following this, the doubled figures and their silhouettes, which all duel for prominence on Lynch's screen of shifting planes, show how a double that performs in a slightly different way to the original is not a true double. Rather, the sequence shows how a person contains multitudes of potential performances. This is more evident in the main diegesis as actors play multiple characters with significantly different characteristics. The dance sequence is more nuanced. It shows how there are performances within each performance. When the silhouettes loom into the

foreground, an effect emerges where the dancers dance within their own shadows. Symbolically, they dance within themselves.

Whilst this demonstrates Butler's description of inconsistencies and alliances within a single subject, it remains a fundamentally solipsistic view of social assemblage. As Betty's translucent face fills the screen, for a few moments the image shows the doubled dancing pairs, dancing inside their own silhouettes, all inside Betty's head. If, as most critics and scholars suggest, this is part of Diane's fantasy or dream, then this sequence represents all that is internalised, selfish, and introspective.[44] There is no attempt to connect with people and the world outside of the borders of the self. It is a view of the world that fears the abject: that which spills outside of subject boundaries.

Despite my ambivalent reading of the jitterbug sequence, the extent to which such a scene can only be facilitated by the technical apparatus of the film should be noted. Only screen media can create visual collages in this way. The shifting of the three image planes forces the viewer to acknowledge the manipulation of the image, and concordantly asks the viewer to consider the image as an object constructed for them (the audience is shown the bare blue screen, usually an invisible technology), as an audience, to consume. The viewer's connection to this self-centred assemblage is only achieved via the technical object of the film, and the deliberately jarring composition of this scene makes them realise this fact.

Although Betty/Diane imagines a world devoid of abjection, the nature of the term means that it erupts regardless. One of *Mulholland Drive*'s most alarming sequences is the first encounter with 'the bum' behind a diner called 'Winkie's'. Dan and his friend approach the dilapidated and graffiti strewn wall behind Winkie's. They walk slowly, Dan ahead of his companion whilst the camera tracks back. This is intercut with the camera slowly tracking towards the wall. Dan looks increasingly uneasy and Badalamenti's droning, low-frequency

[44] See McGowan, Lentzner and Ross, Shostak, Wilson, Hayles and Gessler, and Powell.

score plays. Glissando synths play as the camera cannot get any closer to the wall without revealing what is around the corner. A discordant sound plays as the bum suddenly slides into view [fig. 3.3].

Figure 3.3. The abject appearance of 'the bum'.

The bum is a key figure and appears to wield some form of control over the more surreal narrative turns (the bum is literally seen holding the 'key' later in the film). Despite the terror the bum invokes in Dan, it (the bum is not gendered) is not physically harmful. Its appearance (both its looks and presence) is what causes alarm. As with the solipsistic jitterbug dance in the opening credits, abjection is threatening to characters who exist for, and within, themselves, as it forces them to contend with that which lies outside their body. If the abject exists then solipsism is impossible; if solipsism holds true, then nothing is abject as nothing outside of the self exists. In *Mulholland Drive*, encounters with the bum mark moments of narrative progression, which also means, in this film, a progression of identity. Thus, the film must move through abjection to change.[45] Reconfigurations of identity and

[45] There are other abject figures in the film who marry an unsettling physical appearance with a liminal location. The powerful Mr Roque in his sealed off red office, and the Cowboy in the deserted corral. Both Mr Roque and the Cowboy also act as conduits through which plot and characters are progressed and altered.

society in the world, as I have argued (reindividuation is inherently abject), must progress through an abject stage.

Casting Sylvia North

The central audition sequence in *Mulholland Drive* demonstrates two different conceptions of individuation between performers and technical objects. I will subsequently contrast this scene to the Club Silencio cabaret performance and argue that, whilst Silencio evokes powerful emotional affects, the auditions are more geared towards forging a connection between the film and the spectator.

Connie Stevens' 'Sixteen Reasons' (1960) starts in a sound bridge from the previous scene. Carol (Elizabeth Lackey) is framed in a medium close-up, with her head bowed in front of a microphone. As the main vocal part of the song begins, she raises her head and begins to lip-sync to the song. As the performance continues, the camera gradually tracks back, increasingly revealing more details of the scene. At the point where Carol is in a three-quarter shot, her four backing 'singers' are now in shot. The clothes, hair, and décor suggest a late 1950s or early 1960s setting. The camera pulls back further to show that the singers are in a recording booth [fig. 3.4]. As the tracking shot continues, a film camera intrudes into frame left, and it is revealed that the music studio is a set on a studio lot. The screen is now filled with producers, technicians, cameras, and lights [fig. 3.5]. A medium shot shows onlookers in suits (presumably film executives), behind whom emerges Betty. The film cuts to a medium close-up of Adam Kesher in the director's chair holding a megaphone. The camera slowly zooms in whilst he turns around and stares intently out of frame left [fig. 3.6]. The camera cuts to Betty shaking hands with one of the executives in a three-quarter shot. Her face freezes as she catches Adam's eye and the camera zooms in

(losing focus momentarily) until she is framed in close-up [fig. 3.7]. A shot-reverse-shot sequence shows Adam and Betty holding this gaze. Carol's performance ends, and she and Adam exchange pleasantries. 'Don't you forget me. I'm the girl that's playing this part', she insists. Adam puts off committing to any promises (as he is being threatened to cast the unknown actor Camilla Rhodes).

Figure 3.4. Auditions for *The Sylvia North Story* involve miming to 1960s pop songs in a studio.

Figure 3.5. The recording booth is revealed to be a set on a studio lot.

Figure 3.6. Adam Kesher notices Betty.

Figure 3.7. Betty returns Adam's gaze.

Adam returns to his chair and is informed that Camilla Rhodes is the next to audition. He sits, lights a cigarette, and blows a smoke ring. A tight angle on the music studio set shows Camilla entering from frame right. The camera pans left to follow her as she takes her place in front of the microphone. The camera cuts back to Adam who calls 'Action!' He

watches impassively as Linda Scott's 'I've Told Every Little Star' (1961) begins to play. As with Carol's audition, at the point that the main vocal starts, the camera cuts to Camilla in close-up as she begins to mime [fig. 3.8]. The camera cuts back to Adam who calls for his producer. The camera cuts to a full shot of Camilla through the glass of the music studio set. Producer Jason (Michael Fairman) approaches Adam and asks if he has something to tell him. Jason is framed in close-up, and suddenly one of the mobsters from earlier in the film looms into shot behind his right shoulder. The Linda Scott song is muffled as a rumbling tone plays on the score. The camera cuts to Adam in close-up who declaims: 'This is the girl.' The camera cuts back to the mobster who moves away from Jason and speaks: 'Excellent choice Adam'. The camera then cuts to Betty who suddenly remembers an arrangement to meet Rita. The camera zooms in on her shocked face. The camera cuts to Adam who turns again to look for Betty. The camera cuts to Betty in extreme close-up [fig. 3.9] and then to a reverse angle extreme close-up of Adam [fig. 3.10]. The camera cuts to Betty in a full shot who makes her excuses and runs off. The camera cuts back to Adam who longingly watches her leave as the scene ends.

Figure 3.8. Camilla Rhodes performs Linda Scott's 'Every Little Star' for her audition.

Figure 3.9. The extreme close-up of Betty intensifies her gaze.

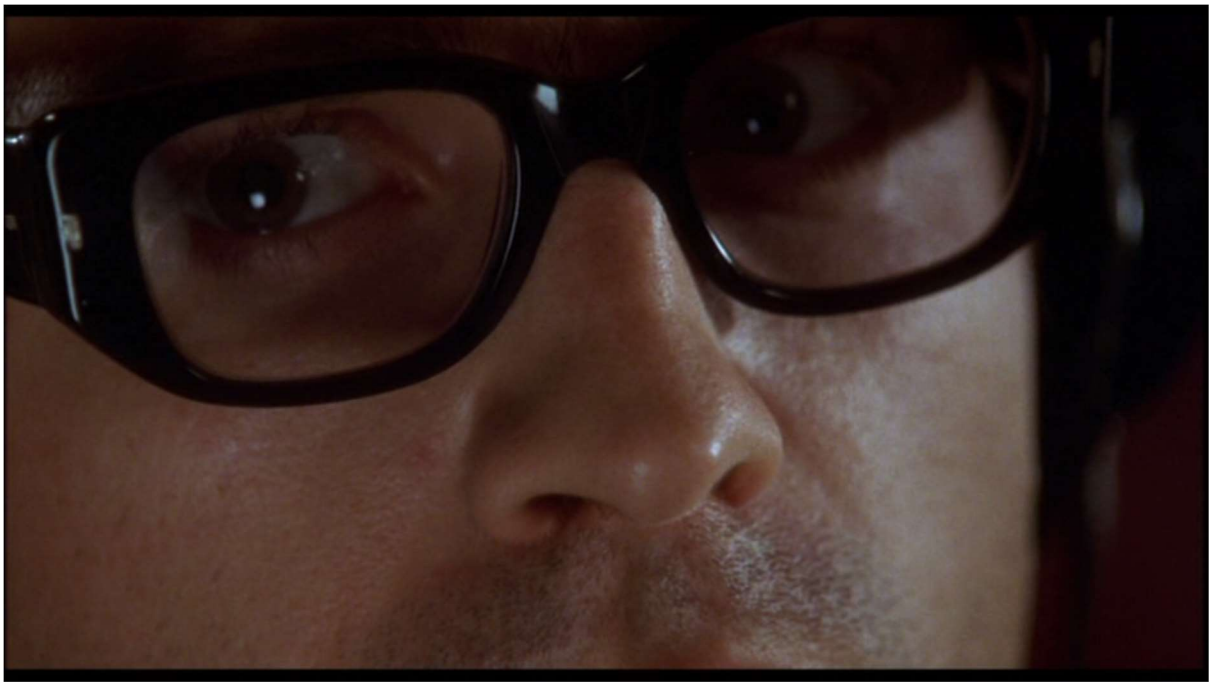

Figure 3.10. Which is matched in turn by Adam.

Mark Mazullo remarks that ‘several scenes in *Mulholland Drive* demonstrate the female protagonists reduced to nonverbal forms of communication; cut off from words and the ability to make sound, they instead lip-synch songs or stifle themselves when screaming

or crying.'[46] Mazullo frames this trope as purely oppressive: female characters being rendered voiceless. Whilst I am sympathetic to this view I also believe that Lynch deploys it as a device to allow for an increased focus on gestural performance; in that the character can only perform physically within such limitations, and the viewer's attention is guided towards this aspect.

Having just watched Betty rehearse, and then perform, an audition for a dreadful non-starter of a film, it is signalled to the audience that a further casting scene will follow (Betty is being taken to meet Adam Kesher). As the viewer is prepared, the revelations of artificiality in the *Sylvia North* sequence are not violently disruptive to behold. Lynch does start the scene with several small swerves that serve to marginally unbalance his audience; to prod them into alertness. Although it is obvious, it takes a moment to register that Carol is lip-synching to 'Sixteen Reasons'. The slow reverse tracking of the camera keeps revealing new details, and subsequently subverts them. Firstly, the presence of backing 'singers' is unveiled; secondly, the recording booth and studio [fig. 3.4]; thirdly, the studio set that undermines the first two reveals. In the interval between the camera moving past the edge of the wall of the music studio set and before the crew members and technical equipment are shown, there is a disturbing rupture. A camera intrudes from the bottom of the screen, and the viewer's gaze is naturally drawn to this foreign object. In the split second it takes to process this new piece of visual data the camera pulls back far enough to reveal the edge of the music studio set. There is a brief interlude before the extent of the set is uncovered where there is only a gap at the edge of the frame. As the viewer's gaze is concerned with the camera in the foreground, the move through this interstice plays out in their peripheral vision, furthering its destabilising effect. Finally, the entire film set is visible [fig. 3.5] and, having gained a sufficient sense of location, the viewer can relax. Frida Beckman writes about this in terms of

[46] Mazullo, 'Remembering Pop: David Lynch and the Sound of the '60s', 501.

schizoanalysis: 'as the voice releases itself from the sensory-motor link with the images, Deleuze explains, space becomes empty, disconnected, unpeopled…. These spaces are not characterised by gaps or absence of links but present the emergence of an infinite possibility of linkage.'[47] In this part of the scene, Lynch presents not only the unlinking of sound and vision, but also creates momentary visual interstices between the edge of the set-within-the-set and the frame of the film. These un-linkings can be transiently traumatic, but they lead to potential new combinations.

These small challenges to the audience's diegetic grounding serve as a kind of cinematic individuation foreplay; a warmup for the headline act. Fittingly, the next part of the casting scene fulfils the same role for the affective, emotional aspect of cinematic individuation. The exchange of lingering glances between Adam [fig. 3.6] and Betty [fig. 3.7] evokes the 'eyes-meeting-across-a-crowded-room' cliché. However, given that the audience's distinction between authenticity and artificiality is weak at this point, they will either not trust the trope, or will see it as a familiar safety net.

The second half of the scene thus plays out following these primers for the viewer's emotional and cognitive responses. The structure of mimed audition and locked gazes has been established, and this frees the viewer to focus on the physical performance of Camilla Rhodes miming 'I've Told Every Little Star'. Unlike Carol, Camilla performs solo. There is no grouping of actors then, but the lip-synching forms an assemblage between original vocal and performer.[48] Camilla looks stiff and nervous as she approaches the microphone, and the camera focuses on Adam during the opening bars of the song. As the main vocals start the

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[47] Beckman, 'Hearing Voices: Schizoanalysis and the voice as Image in the Cinema of David Lynch', 85.

[48] Eric Gans argues that Linda Scott's vocals symbolise Betty's fantasy: 'Via Scott's interpretation, the song enacts the protagonist's empowerment, her mastery of desire, but Diane's fiction would be fantasy, not art, if it made this empowerment her own. The limits of Betty's mastery of desire are revealed in the acting sequence that directly precedes this scene; she can act out the past generation's sensuality with its aging men, but not perform its youthful liberation from desire.' For Gans, the eventual failure of Betty's fantasy is that it cannot escape the clutches of the old white patriarchy. Gans, 'Chronicles of Love & Resentment No. 269: *Mulholland Drive*'.

camera cuts to a close-up of Camilla, and she performs directly to the camera [fig. 3.8]. With her arms behind her back, she acts with her eyes and mouth. The performance is subtle and affecting and has the effect of both reminding the viewer that this is a mime, and allowing that distinction to fade away. Camilla's technical individuation with the song means that the separation between original performer and mimed performance is indiscernible. Even when the camera cuts to a full shot at a forty-five-degree angle, Camilla's gaze still looks down the lens, sustaining the attraction of the viewer. Elena del Rio describes that in *Mulholland Drive*'s mime acts 'representation begins from the real/actual and achieves a more or less distorted version thereof, performativity engenders the false and elevates it to the status of true effects/affects.'[49] This conjures Deleuze's Nietzschean 'powers of the false', in that the performance troubles the authenticity of the original. This also chimes with Judith Butler's project that seeks to challenge established norms by performing alterity. I do not fully subscribe to Del Rio's understanding as 'engendering the false' runs counter to the conception of 'true effect/affects'.

When Adam tells the producer 'this is the girl', the statement loses its ambiguous finality: this surely is 'the girl'. Whatever it means to be 'the girl' is whatever it is that Camilla is performing. Like Parciak's 'validity', if something makes sense only to you or only in a singular moment, it still makes sense. At the line in the song 'maybe you could love me too' the camera zooms in on Betty and cuts to Adam turning to look at her. They then share gazes in consecutive extreme close-up [figs. 3.9 and 3.10]. The pair are connected into an assemblage by the technical object of the film which gives the illusion of not only the gazes drawing them closer together but puts their faces side-by-side in consecutive shots. However, the existing assemblage in which this is set (the performance of 'I've Told Every Little Star') bridges this sequence, bringing Linda Scott, Camilla Rhodes, Adam Kesher,

[49] del Rio, *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance*, 180.

Betty Elms, and the viewer into a technical assemblage forged by cinematic individuation. The scene is, in a way, the 'optimistic' peak of *Mulholland Drive* in that it hints towards the potential contained within an assemblage founded upon performance—the mimed aspect of which would be described by Deleuze and Guattari as deterritorialising, 'the singer who doesn't sing and gives birth to her song out of her nonsinging'.[50]

Silencio

If we compare *The Sylvia North Story* auditions to the famous 'Club Silencio' sequence we encounter many of the same central themes (performance, emotion, the loss of meaning in words). I would argue, however, that the auditions present a fundamentally more positive view of assemblage than is found in Club Silencio.

Betty and Rita embark on a late-night trip to the mysterious Club Silencio. A devilish impresario repeatedly explains in several languages that 'there is no band', merely a tape recording. He manipulates the disconnect between audio and visuals to construct several illusions, including summoning thunder that causes Betty to violently shake, and the auditorium to be bathed in blue light. Following his act, a singer, Rebekah del Rio, mimes her own Spanish language version of Roy Orbison's 'Crying' (1961).[51] Initially, del Rio is filmed in a high angle long shot but, following a reaction close-up of Betty and Rita, she too is framed in a close-up. A shot-reverse-shot sequence shows that Betty and Rita are deeply affected by this performance, to the point where they both begin to cry. Suddenly, del Rio collapses as the taped song continues to play. The scene ends as Betty and Rita are suddenly aware that they now possess a strange blue box to which they have the key.

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[50] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Pour une Littérature Mineure* [*Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 1975], 21.
[51] 'Llorando' (2001).

A significant amount has been written about Club Silencio.[52] Robert Sinnerbrink sums up the sequence in his terms of cinematic romanticism:

> This extraordinary fusion of affective, intuitive, and reflective expression—combining visceral affect, aesthetic performance, emotional recognition, and metacinematic reflection—goes well beyond any discrete narrative function or supplementary evocation of mood … it had become a liberated dimension of aesthetic expression, an *autonomous mood* sequence no longer subordinated to narrative ends, and expressive of a multitude of affective and reflective dimensions.[53]

As I remarked previously, Sinnerbrink's cinematic romanticism works according to a similar principle to my cinematic individuation, but crucially fails to acknowledge the technical aspect of film. In one way of thinking, Club Silencio is a more 'honest' investigation into the role played by technical objects in individuation than the previous audition scene. The audience (both pro-filmic and cinematic) are repeatedly told that 'there is no band, only a tape recording', and del Rio's collapse breaks the spell of verisimilitude. It is testament to the mime skills of the performers that the audience can momentarily forget the artificiality of the spectacle, even given the continual reveals. In the audition scene, the performative goal is to provide the most 'authentic' lip-sync rendition. Adam's directorial orders ('Action!') create distinct markers between which the performance exists—there is a reasonable separation between onstage and backstage.

But Silencio only foregrounds the technical object in the content of the scene—not, as the audition does, in its framing. In the audition, the camera interrupts the performance through the reverse track that reveals first the void at the edge of the set, and then the film

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[52] Jennifer A. Hudson writes about the loss of fixed meaning in verbal communication in '"No Hay Banda, and yet We Hear a Band": David Lynch's Reversal of Coherence in *Mulholland Drive*', *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 56, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 17 – 24; Zina Giannopoulou addresses reflexivity and performance in 'Mulholland Drive and Cinematic Reflexivity', *Mulholland Drive* (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2013); Elena del Rio sees the scene as a concerted effort to disrupt narrative cohesion (del Rio, 2008); Frida Beckman traces a move from representation to emotional expression (Beckman, 2014); Patricia Pisters describes how the scene could represent an schizoanalysis triggering of affect in the face of catatonic inaction, 'Delirium Cinema or Machines of the Invisible?', *Deleuze and the Schizoanalysis of Cinema*, eds. Ian Buchanan and Patricia MacCormack (London: Continuum, 2008), 102 – 115.
[53] Sinnerbrink, 'Silencio', 89.

crew. In Club Silencio, the breakdown of the performance only provokes extreme affects in the watching Betty and Rita. The music plays on (and thus scores the scene) despite del Rio's collapse, while Betty and Rita continue to be shown in close-ups revealing their emotional state. Here, the revelation of technical individuation is deployed for purely aesthetic and affective ends, for both characters within the film, and viewers of *Mulholland Drive*. Counter to this, in the audition, the disruption of the reality effect, and the foregrounding of the technical object are only displayed for the viewer. Identification with the characters (through the music and the close-ups) keeps you in tune with the 'emotions' of the film whilst the filming strategy unsettles your sense of being-in-the-film-world. The two movements which prepare the spectator for cinematic individuation. Personally, whilst watching these moments I find myself experiencing a strong emotional response to the film yet am forced to consider the technical aspects of its creation. My grounding in physical reality is stripped away as I reindividuate onto a plane that is predicated upon the cinematic. Yet, this is experience is made doubly unsettling by the self-reflexive aspects of the film. I am overwhelmed by the audio-visual strategies but am constantly reminded of my physical existence as the viewer. Yet, as the *Mulholland Drive* places the behind-the-scenes/in-front-of-the-screen experience onscreen, my experience as spectator is co-opted in the filmic world. Whilst I am aware of my existence outside of the film, this existence (the auditorium/reality) appears to cross the boundary onto the screen. Whereas self-reflexive film welcomes a degree of 'real life' into its cinematic sphere, so does the viewership of such films invite an element of the cinematic into the viewing space.

Hence, Club Silencio is a more obvious example of pure aesthetic affect that Sinnerbrink is looking for in *Mulholland Drive*, but the *Sylvia North* audition demonstrates the necessity of the technical apparatus for these concepts to operate at their full capacity—at least in order for cinematic individuation to occur.

Diane's suicide

The film's climax is presented in terms of a schizoanalytic breakdown. Abrasive sound design and disorientating visuals (both special effects and framing) combine with a succession of threshold crossings to provoke a destabilising affect.

After Diane/Betty orders Camilla/Rita's murder in the diner, the film fades to a shot tracking towards the 'bum's' alley. A red light fades in and out slowly, shining against the wall of the alley. The tracking speed slows down as the camera approaches the corner of the wall. This time the bum does not appear, and the camera turns the corner and tracks towards the bum, who is sitting on overturned shopping carts, with smoke rising from behind. As the camera closes in on the bum, it becomes apparent that it is turning the blue box over and over in its hands [fig. 3.11]. The bum places the box into a brown paper bag and drops it to the floor. The camera cuts to a shot of the open bag on the ground, displaying the blue box within. Distorted and sustained gongs and didgeridoos are playing on the score as the camera zooms in slightly. The elderly couple from earlier in the film appear, in miniature and sped-up, and walk out of the bag, laughing and flailing their arms [fig. 3.12].

Figure 3.11. The bum toys with the blue box.

Figure 3.12. The unsettling elderly couple emerge from the bag as homunculi. They are sped-up, hence the blurred resolution of this still.

The camera cuts to a blue key (which signifies that the hitman completed the job) on Diane's lounge table. The camera pans left and up to reveal Diane, unblinking and trembling. A violent knocking sound startles her and the camera cuts to the bottom of her door; the miniature couple are crawling underneath it [fig. 3.13]. The camera cuts to an extreme

close-up of Diane's eye. The soundtrack is a mixture of droning music, thunderclaps, knocking, high-pitched laughter, and screaming. Diane slowly blinks twice as lightning illuminates her. The camera cuts to a wide full shot of her sitting on the couch. She suddenly leaps to her feet and runs off frame left. A brief shot shows the couple, now full-size, laughing and reaching their hands directly to the camera [fig. 3.14]. The screaming now dominates the soundtrack. An over-the-shoulder shot of Diane shows that the screams are now hers as she backs away into her bedroom [fig. 3.15]. She is pursued on to her bed, but jerky handheld camera movements make it hard to discern the action. She reaches into her bedside drawer, pulls out a gun, and shoots herself. The gunshot leads to a match on action and on sound. The soundtrack is suddenly silent, and the camera abruptly cuts to a wide full shot of the bed with cordite smoke filling the air.

Figure 3.13. They enter Diane's apartment…

Figure 3.14. Grow to full size…

Figure 3.15. And terrify Diane to the point of suicide.

Martha Nochimson proposes that 'Betty's dark awakening as Diane is not waking from a dream…. It is a threshold experience in the continuum of movement from lively desires and hope to the death of creativity in this Hollywood tale.'[54] Nochimson also

[54] Nochimson, *Lynch Swerves*, 113.

describes the encounter with the bum, and the Club Silencio show as 'threshold experiences'. At its core, and I will return to this idea, the threshold experience is the experience of phasing and dephasing from one state to another. Lynch depicts threshold experiences as horrific—they demonstrate that the process of reindividuation, reterritorialization, or entering a previously unimaginable state of being, is (as I have frequently stated), inherently, very traumatic. This trauma must be experienced in order to progress. The threshold is a liminal stage; an abject zone of indistinction to be traversed.

The final sequence is thus set in motion by the threshold experience of the abject bum [fig. 3.11]. Lynch sets up several passageways here: the passage behind the diner, the bum as Janus-esque gatekeeper, and the blue box which seems to act as a kind of portal. Nochimson notes that 'Lynch's sense of transitions (corridors between doors) that result in new worlds that are not fantasies but complex aspects of experience.'[55] The creepy miniature elderly couple embody this. They show how Lynch treats passageways and openings as literal movements between worlds, and how these openings are always permeable. The couple travel across three boundaries. They escape the blue box (1) and then emerge from the paper bag (2) [fig. 3.12]. In crossing that border, they do not enter the bum's alley, but Diane's apartment (3).

Despite Diane's door being locked, the couple's diminutive size allows them to climb in underneath [fig. 3.13]. It is through an interstitial space (a gap) that they gain access. As in the *Sylvia North* audition scene, where Lynch created interstices through framing, *Mulholland Drive* shows how nothing ever quite joins up, or is ever sealed. At each juncture of objects, and at each threshold, there is always a gap—'it's how the light gets in'. Nothing can ever be closed or completed as this gap will always allow something to leave or enter, and therefore everything is open to change. When Deleuze presents his thesis on Henri

[55] Nochimson, *Lynch Swerves*, 115.

Bergson in *Cinema I* (1983), he proposes that sets are never completed and always remain open: 'a closed system is never absolutely closed … it is connected in space to other systems by a more or less "fine" thread'.[56] In *Mulholland Drive*, these other systems include locations, characters, and identities. The thread that connects them is the film itself (itself being a set). The closed system of the finished film is also not closed, as it is always open to cinematic individuation with a viewer.

The remainder of this final sequence is a sustained audio-visual overload. The soundtrack builds, in successive layers, into a distressing soundscape. The musical score is a distorted and sustained bass note played on a stringed instrument. To this bedrock is added a sharp incessant knocking, then the giggles of the elderly couple, and then Diane's screams. This is all non-diegetic until a thunder clap allows a match on sound, and a sound bridge into the next shot. Now the elderly couple are full-size, and the sound is diegetic. Badalamenti adds the noise of rushing wind to the accompanying score. Lynch cuts between two shots. One from Diane's perspective [fig. 3.14] and one showing her in close-up or over-the-shoulders of the couple [fig. 3.15]. The former is alarming to watch, as the man and the woman grasp directly at the camera and jostle for space, which lends an unsettling clumsiness to the shot. The latter setups are similarly disturbing as they imbue the viewer with the gaze of the persecutor. Either the audience feels Diane's utter terror, or they feel responsible for causing her distress. Blue flashes of lightning further distort the images. The experience of watching the scene is exhausting (I realise afterwards that I often hold my breath for the duration) and unpleasant. When Diane shoots herself, the soundtrack is immediately silent. Suicide is a release and a relief.

This ending can be understood in terms of schizoanalysis. It is a sequence which attempts to push past the barrier of 'The Real' which cannot be experienced or represented.

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[56] Deleuze, *Cinema I*, 20.

The images and sounds are uncomfortable to experience as the schizophrenic breakthrough itself is always abrasive—it aims to jolt. The conditions of change will involve a painful mutation. The viewer might feel a sense of relief after the gunshot—they have survived the process, but have they been reassembled? I believe not, as the death and resulting corpse show that the film could not go far enough. It tapped out. As Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge, artistic attempts at schizoanalysis tend to be failures—yet they must keep failing over and over. At the film's conclusion, the audience is left with, as described by del Rio, 'Diane's fetid, decomposing body, which, like the monstrous, disintegrating body of Hollywood, lies beyond any capacity for action or transformation.[57]' This is always a side-effect of schizoanalysis: that it leads back to the body without organs that stands for the zero-intensity of the capitalist system. Fortunately, the body-without-organs is also a blank canvas, upon which the process of schizoanalysis can be attempted again.

Despite all its attempts to break the sensory-motor experience, to insert non-narrative events (those not strictly tied to the *fabula* of the film that appeal directly to emotional affect, cinematic romanticism (*per* Sinnerbrink), cinematic individuation, and the exposing of interstices (*lacunae* within the film and *trompe l'oeil* achieved through framing), *Mulholland Drive* fails as the pieces are too easily put back together. By playing by genre rules, and by daring audiences to make narrative sense, the film condemns itself to become sensible. No matter how it is put together, if the film can be ordered then it will fail at a schizoanalytic breakthrough as it is still beholden to hegemonic narrative structures. This provides an explanation to why Lynch turned out another Hollywood tale, a much more abstract one, for his next film: *Inland Empire*.

[57] del Rio, *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance*, 187.

Hollywood, California: 2006

The middle of the decade saw the trends established in the 1990s (studio mergers) and early 2000s (franchise film series) well entrenched. After several years of negotiations, Disney purchased the animation studio Pixar for $7.4 billion. The deal made Pixar majority stakeholder, and Apple co-founder, Steve Jobs the largest shareholder in the Disney Company. Not only had Disney shored up their grip on the family-film market, but they had further blended the film industry into the technology consumer market. Disney also had the highest grossing film of the year with *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (Gore Verbinski), which grossed $1.06 billion. Along with this, the other nine of the top ten grossing films of the year were all part of wider franchises or were hopeful (and these were successful) franchise launch pads.[58]

In the intervening five years between *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire*, David Lynch devoted much time to his website, davidlynch.com (now defunct), where he released a succession of flash animations and short experiments with digital film.[59] Liberated by the low cost of shooting on digital video and intrigued by the murky quality of the standard definition (SD) format, Lynch set out to make a self-funded and self-distributed feature film. Top up funding was eventually provided by Vivendi-owned Studio Canal, and distribution by 518 Media—a US company previously known for distributing several of Werner Herzog's films.

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[58] Ron Howard's *The Da Vinci Code* (first in its series) grossed $758 million; Carlos Saldanha's *Ice age: The Meltdown* (second) grossed $660 million; the twenty-first James Bond film, *Casino Royale* (Martin Campbell), grossed $599 million; Shawn Levy's *Night at the Museum* (first) grossed $574 million; John Lasseter's *Cars* (first), for Disney-Pixar, grossed $462 million; Brett Ratner's *X-Men: The Last Stand* (third) grossed $495 million; J. J. Abrams' *Mission Impossible III* (third) grossed $399 million; Bryan Singer's *Superman Returns* (technically the sixth of Warner Bros. various *Superman* films from 1978-present) grossed $391 million; George Miller's *Happy Feet* (first) grossed $384 million.

[59] Zoran Samardzija writes about the transmedia aspect of *Inland Empire* in regards to the internet and digital video in 'DavidLynch.com: Auteurship in the Age of the Internet and Digital Cinema', *Scope An online journal of film and television studies*, issue 16 (February 2010), http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/scope/documents/2010/february-2010/samardzija.pdf (accessed 29/05/2017).

Despite ceding a degree of financial control, Lynch wielded a great deal of authority over *Inland Empire*. He is credited as director, writer, cinematographer, editor, and co-composer. The filming process was improvisational, on Lynch's part, as he was writing scenes the day before shooting them. The result is, unsurprisingly, a singularly fragmented film that is far harder to extract order and meaning out of than *Mulholland Drive*. Daniel Yacavone describes it as 'uber-reflexive' due to the breadth of cinema history, technology, filmmaking practice, and cinema spectatorship to which it refers.[60] Like many of Lynch's films, it is tempting to read the film in terms of erotic, and corporeally perverse, Freudian symbolism. As I mentioned previously, adherence to such metaphors forces too rigid a structure onto the film, and classic psychoanalytic readings merely return aberrant works back into a hegemonic order. If something does not neatly fit into established discourse, then sand down the edges by unravelling non-linearity and ordering symbols until you have a solid taxonomy. How it reads is inconsequential; that it can be read is all that matters under this logic.

The following synopsis cannot really transmit the experience of watching *Inland Empire*, but some readers may find it useful as an orientation aid.

Inland Empire begins with a needle in the grove of a record playing *Axxon N*: 'the longest running radio play in history'. A young woman, 'the Lost Girl' (Karolina Gruszka), sitting in a room cries whilst watching static on a television. The TV set changes to show another room. In this room, a fixed camera setup shows three people in rabbit suits and human clothes. They rarely move and speak in cryptic statements. A laugh track is heard at arbitrary moments.

The main narrative thread follows actor Nikki Grace (Laura Dern), who is initially encountered waiting to hear if she was successful in her audition for the lead role in a film called *On High in Blue Tomorrows*. Nikki is visited at home by a strange woman (Grace

[60] Daniel Yacavone, *Film World*s, 132.

Zabriskie), who claims to be her new neighbour. The visitor seems to know many details about Nikki's life and the new film. She recounts two parables about the nature of evil, her tone becomes threatening, and Nikki becomes unsettled. Eventually the visitor describes her uncertainty over the correct time, stating that if it were tomorrow then Nikki would be sitting on the other side of the room. The camera cuts to where she is gesturing, and Nikki is indeed there with two friends as she discovers that she was successful in her audition.

Nikki meets with *On High in Blue Tomorrows* director Kingsley Stewart (Jeremy Irons) and leading man Devon Berk (Justin Theroux). Kingsley is optimistic about the film and about Nikki's upcoming performance. Nikki and Devon appear together on a chat show where the host (Diane Ladd) remarks on Devon's reputation for seducing his co-stars. Backstage, Devon is warned away from Nikki due to her husband's underworld connections. Nikki, Devon, Kingsley, and Kingsley's strange assistant Freddie (Harry Dean Stanton) are rehearsing in the studio when they are disturbed by a noise coming from the set for a house. Devon investigates but finds nothing. Afterwards, Kingsley admits that *On High in Blue Tomorrows* is a remake of a German film called *47* which was never finished due to the murders of its two lead actors.

Nikki becomes immersed in her role of 'Susan', and begins an affair with Devon, echoing the fictional romance between his character 'Billy' and Susan. Whilst parking her car in an alley, Nikki sees a door marked 'Axxon N'. Upon entering it, she finds herself in the set. She makes a noise, and Devon comes to investigate; in becomes clear that it was Nikki who interrupted rehearsal previously. Shocked by this, she runs away from Devon. She hides in a prop façade of a house, which turns out to contain a real interior. This sequence involves crossing multiple thresholds and seemingly moving between several ontological levels. I will examine this in detail later in this chapter.

From this point onwards, the narrative fractures and unravels. Various disconnected plot lines are set into action, some of which feature characters played by Laura Dern who may or may not be Nikki or Susan. A woman (Julia Ormond) being questioned by the police claims she was hypnotised and ordered to kill someone using a screwdriver. She lifts her shirt to reveal a screwdriver sticking out of her side. Nikki encounters a group of prostitutes (referred to by Lynch in interviews as the Valley Girls) who are prone to performing dance routines—something I will suggest provides a counterbalance to the abject stress of the rest of the film. Eventually they walk the streets continually asking, 'who is she' and 'tell me if you've known me before'. A mysterious group of Polish men discuss their business in a lavishly gilded room. In 1930s Poland, prostitutes worry about a string of murders. In the present day, Susan attends a barbeque with some Polish circus workers who communicate in detached statements. Susan enters a room in a nightclub where she recounts in long soliloquies, a history of sexual and domestic abuse. Several characters discuss the threat of 'the Phantom' (Krzysztof Majchrzak), a hypnotist. Following some terrifying visions, Nikki arms herself with a screwdriver.

Nikki/Susan stands on Hollywood Boulevard with the Valley Girls and the woman with the screwdriver from earlier approaches and stabs her. She stumbles down the street before collapsing in front of three homeless people. Crucially, these vagrants include a black man (Terry Crews), an elderly black woman (Helena Chase), and a Japanese woman (Nae). This is a rare instance that a meta-Hollywood film includes non-white characters. Tellingly, as I will later discuss, non-white identity is found at the margins of the mainstream and its existence is precarious. As Nikki/Susan dies, the old woman holds a lighter in front of her face and tells her 'no more blue tomorrows'. Kingsley yells 'cut', and the camera pans back to reveal that this is a film set. The crew applaud Nikki's performance and she walks away in a daze. She wanders into a cinema, where she watches scenes from *On High in Blue*

Tomorrows as well as footage of herself standing in the auditorium. She walks to the projection booth but finds herself in an apartment building. She encounters the frightening Phantom, and shoots him repeatedly, which causes his face to transform into distorted visages. She flees into a room (seemingly the room the rabbits inhabit) where she meets the crying girl from the opening scene. Nikki and the girl kiss, and Nikki fades away. The young woman runs into another room where she embraces a man and a child. The credits scene shows Nikki back in her home with a large cast of characters: some from earlier and some new ones. Together they dance to Nina Simone's 'Sinnerman' (1965)—a more uplifting and politically motivated intrusion of blackness into an abject, white, Hollywood fantasy.

Performance Unbound

Inland Empire is a film about performance, and indeed matches this in its narrative setup before fragmenting into a form that cannot be conventionally comprehended. Whilst various confusing situations and characters are introduced in the first half of the film, the film-within-a-film device is well-worn trope with which the audience can anchor themselves. This is how *Mulholland Drive* remains more-or-less legible, despite its narrative cul-de-sacs. The *On High in Blue Tomorrows* plotline does not merely serve as a pilot light for the audience, but works to make them receptive to the idea of performance. This is frequently reinforced by dialogue during the first half. Director Kingsley tells his cast and crew 'If we all play our role, do our best.… This is a star-maker'. Likewise, Devon tells Nikki: 'I'm expecting an academy award performance from you, right out of the gate.' These comments hint that Nikki is expected to perform, and that the viewer should ready themselves for her grand performance. When Kingsley tells Nikki and Devon to read through 'the earlier scenes that indicate so beautifully your character', it is an invitation for the audience to devise a set

of fixed positions as to what Nikki's character is. Later these fixed positions can be undermined with greater effect. Kingsley's assistant Freddie gives the true hint for how the latter half of the film will proceed, and what direction Nikki's performance will take: 'there is a vast network right? An ocean of possibilities.'

The disconnected collage which the film descends into is Nikki's experience of experimenting with various roles, in order to perform the character of Susan. She comes to realise that the way forward in this endeavour is to confront trauma and to eventually form a communal assemblage. Martha Nochimson reads the action of *Inland Empire* as a metaphor for the psychological tension experienced by an actor: 'Nikki's confusing but rewarding experience is metaphorically set forth as a disorientating encounter with numerous possible worlds that are unsettlingly endowed with time/space realities of their own.'[61] Nochimson refers to these 'possible worlds' as 'bubble worlds'; not actualised realities, but virtual potentialities, some of which will take root to individuate into the final performance in *On High in Blue Tomorrows*.[62]

This experience is presented as a schizoanalytic approach which embraces a structural breakdown of representation in hope of effecting a breakthrough into a new form of being (performing). Nochimson writes:

> The many worlds in Lynch's film reveal themselves as thresholds through which Nikki moves *without thinking*.… she temporarily and spontaneously loses the boundaries of her distinct ego, a process that is part of diving beneath the surface of the world, with its neat borders and definitive structures.… the roller coaster of a 'becoming energy.'[63]

As with *Mulholland Drive*, the concept of 'thresholds' is significant. In both films, moving across thresholds, be they physical or metaphysical, always involves traversing an interstice. We have seen this already in *Mulholland Drive* in encounters with the awful bum behind the

[61] Nochimson, *Lynch Swerves*, 126.
[62] Nochimson, 126.
[63] Nochimson, 129.

diner, the gaps left between stage-sets and 'reality' (which translate into actual dark voids on the cinema screen), the passage into surreal non-spaces such as Club Silencio, and the terrifying old couple who walk out of a paper bag, under a door, and into the mind of Diane. In Lynch's films, crossing an interstice means crossing an abject zone of exception, wherein a character experiences a collapse of delineations between subject and object. This collapse can usually be ignored, as a character will be reconfigured to their original state upon leaving the abject zone. In *Inland Empire*, Lynch presents what might happen if a character remains egoless upon leaving the zone. Their lack of ego allows them to form collective assemblages with other abject figures (e.g. prostitutes or anthropomorphic rabbits).

I gave examples in Chapter 1 of some scholars who had criticised *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* for presenting a variety of ontological levels as being indistinct. I countered that Wes Craven's intention was probably to achieve this effect.[64] Lynch attains something similar in *Inland Empire* when Nikki and her character Susan's worlds begin to blend. Nochimson writes that 'Nikki's and Susan's worlds suddenly coexist simultaneously so that we can neither separate the actress from her role nor discount one as a fiction.'[65] By destroying the demarcation between actor and character, and between fiction and reality, *Inland Empire* asks the viewer to question why these definitions should exist in the first place. If all identity is performed, then what makes a performed role less authentic than a person's 'true' personality? Going further, what makes any of the realities within which these performed identities exist any more or less real? The question of authenticity brings me back to my discussion of Friedrich Nietzsche from Chapter 2, which the film contends with through its concept of 'the marketplace'. This is introduced by Nikki's visit from her new neighbour.

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[64] Gérard Genette uses the blanket term 'metalepses' to describe shifts between narrative worlds and realities. See *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 234 – 237.
[65] Nochimson, 142.

The Visitor

Nikki's neighbour is an unsettling guest. She seems to know a great deal about a new part which Nikki has auditioned for and insists, quite menacingly, that Nikki will land the role. The visitor tells two stories on the nature of evil. The first goes as follows: 'A little boy went out to play. When he opened his door ... he saw ... the world. As he passed through the doorway ... he caused, a reflection. Evil was born. Evil was born and followed the boy.' The visitor tells a 'variation' of the story: 'A little girl ... went out to play. Lost in the marketplace ... as if half born. Then, not through the marketplace, you see that, don't you? But through the alley behind the marketplace. This is the way to the Palace.'

The first variation of the story invokes several philosophical ideas of the creation of subjectivity: Plato's Cave allegory, Lacan's mirror stage, and Levinas' first encounter with the other, to name a few. The boy conceives of (sees) the world, and by crossing an allegorical threshold, causes his reflection. By creating, and experiencing his reflection, the boy becomes aware of himself as a being: as a subject. In Lynch's films, each crossing of a threshold (often presented literally as a door) involves a splitting in subjectivity, and a subsequent re-assemblage. The threshold is an interstice, an abject zone that must be traversed. Each crossing of the abject zone is a mildly traumatic experience that necessitates the obliteration and reformation of the self. Each time the subject reassembles, they leave something behind: the 'evil' reflection that follows them. For Nietzsche, good and evil are overly Manichean ideas. He wrote in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that 'what the people believe to be good and evil betrays an ancient will to power.'[66] Good and evil are two sides of the same coin, in that they both represent desire and potential of life and becoming. The evil remainder

[66] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 98.

that is left behind after moving through the abject zone of the threshold is the trace of the pre-individual that can be combined with others through social individuation to create new assemblages.

In the second variation, 'the marketplace' represents the non-productive capitalist machine. Nietzsche heralds that 'far from the market-place and fame happens all that is great: far from the market-place and fame have the inventors of new values always lived.'[67] In *Inland Empire*, the marketplace is configured as Hollywood. But whilst the forces of progressive creation may reside outside of Hollywood, the marketplace (as with the body without organs) does clear the way for possible new reindividuations of subjectivity. Nochimson writes that 'Lynch wants his audience to experience the uncertainty of the marketplace behind its vivid appearances.… he encourages us to experience the tension between the cultural expectation that certainty is the truth and his belief in an open universe of potential.'[68] Lynch too, sees that although Hollywood is driven by capital, its inconsistencies contain potential. Nietzsche warns that 'where solitude ceases, there begins the market-place; and where the market-place begins, there also begins the noise of the great play-actors and the buzzing of poisonous flies.'[69] The problem is, to remain solitary is to negate the possibility of forming social assemblages. Therefore, one would remain stuck in entropy, Nietzsche's worst fear. The marketplace is then a necessary stage that must be faced. Whilst there will be many 'poisonous flies', there will also be the 'play-actors'. Nikki is the 'girl lost in the marketplace', and her way out will be to become a play-actor, to experiment with various roles through her powers of performance. Nochimson writes that 'since Lynch believes that we are all innocent before we are distracted by the marketplace [before the boy opens the door and creates evil]. Nikki's innocence is being redeemed because she

[67] Nietzsche, 46.
[68] Nochimson, *Lynch Swerves*, 97 – 98.
[69] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 45.

courageously breaks free of the marketplace by opening herself up to many possibilities'.[70] Once again, 'innocence' is not an inherently desired position as it can be substituted for 'ignorance'. To achieve a position of knowledge, Nikki must allow herself to be abused and tainted by the marketplace. She will retain scars from the experience, but ultimately will gain the ability to form political assemblages.

The 'alley behind the marketplace' that the little girl of the story (Nikki) must locate is another interstitial zone. It is not beyond the marketplace, but beside it. *Inland Empire* represents the marketplace (Hollywood), but offers a parallel course (alleyway) through its post-structuralist narrative. Nochimson proposes that 'the non-local intersection of stories of the marketplace and fictional narrative are all part of the adventure of life, and are part and parcel of how we reach full humanity.'[71] The 'palace', for Nochimson, would relate to her idea of 'full humanity'. In Nietzschean terms, this would stand for 'will to power', and Deleuze and Simondon would frame this as potential or immanence. *Inland Empire* creates a literal version of the parable; Nikki does indeed locate an alleyway behind the marketplace. This leads to an abject experience of schizoanalysis where Nikki experiments with a variety of different performances and forms of assemblage. Ultimately, she will reach the 'palace' of a positive social multitude.

The Alley Behind the Marketplace

Following the early stages of rehearsal and press commitments, Nikki one day finds herself in such an alley, behind such a market place (the studio backlot). In the sequence that follows, Nikki traverses many thresholds, whilst temporality and narrative structure seem to collapse.

[70] Nochimson, *Lynch Swerves*, 129.
[71] Nochimson, 241.

A handheld camera tracks around a wall to reveal a wide-angle shot of an alleyway. A convertible sports car is in the foreground and, in the background, Nikki is walking towards the camera holding some groceries. There is a slight fish-eye effect on the image [fig. 3.16] which invokes a surveillance camera. As Nikki reaches the car, something catches her eye. The camera cuts to a doorway with 'Axxon N' and an arrow scrawled on it in chalk. The camera cuts to a medium shot of Nikki's puzzled reaction, and then cuts to a track-in to the writing on the door. After two more shots of Nikki, the camera follows her as she walks slowly through the door [fig. 3.17]. An industrial soundscape plays on the score as the camera passes through the door. Movement is jerky, and the focus is shallow. It is impossible to make out Nikki or any cuts, and at times the screen is completely black.

Figure 3.16. The literal 'alley behind the marketplace'.

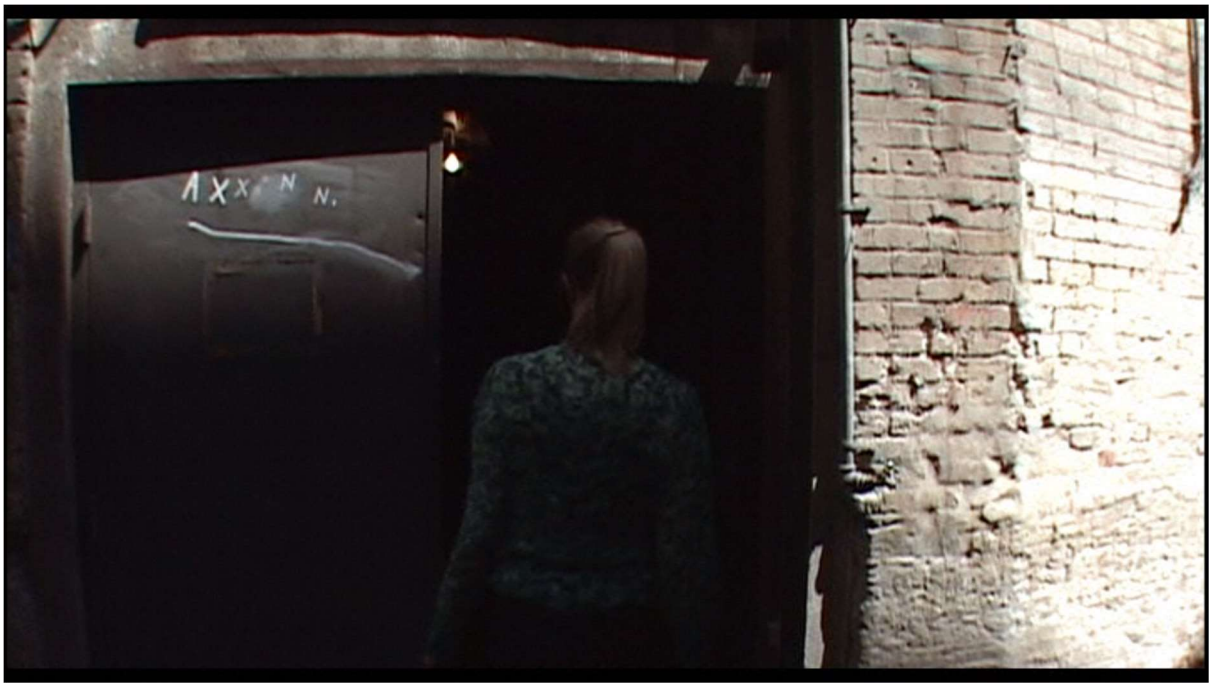

Figure 3.17. The ominous door that seems to be a portal into a realm of performance and potential.

Eventually Nikki emerges from the darkness onto the back of the film set where she sees herself rehearsing with Devon and Kingsley. As with the earlier scene, Devon comes to check, and she runs away from him. She passes through several doors, eventually entering a pink-hued room. Looking in through a window, Devon sees only darkness and cannot hear her calls to him (she calls him Billy, the name of his character in *On High in Blue Tomorrows*). She looks out of the window but sees a front lawn and a gate.

When Nikki returns to the pink room, it is dark aside from a red lamp which oscillates in brightness. Suddenly the lamp blows a fuse, and the room is dark. The camera cuts to a hand-held close-up of the lamp, and rapidly tracks backwards to reveal several Valley Girls standing in the gloom. A light source is introduced: a torch which illuminates the faces of various Valley Girls from below. The Valley Girls are picked out one-by-one in close-up, and they offer non-sequiturs such as ‘look at us and tell us if you’d know us before’, and ‘there was a man who once knew’. Several close-ups of Nikki show her silently sobbing.

One of the Valley Girls says the line ‘strange what love does’. A few seconds later, David Lynch’s ‘Ghost of Love’ (2007) plays on the score. This song opens with the lyric: ‘strange what love does’. ‘When you open your eyes, someone you know will be there’, one woman tells Nikki. Nikki covers her eyes with her fingers. A reverse-angle shot shows her hands coming away from her face in POV. The scene has now changed to a snowy street in Poland. The music continues as a sound bridge.

The alleyway that Nikki walks down is literally behind two marketplaces: the studio lot, and whichever ‘market’ she procured her groceries from. It neatly illustrates a wound between frame right, the wall of the studio (the marketplace), and frame left, the building marked ‘Axxon N’ [fig. 3.16]. The alleyway is an abject space; it contains that which is thrown out, unwanted, or unpresentable. The doorway with ‘Axxon N’ written on it does not represent the ultimate ‘palace’ but is itself a further liminal ‘alleyway’ [fig. 3.17]. The surreal events that Nikki experiences once she passes through the door are a representation of the trauma of existing parallel to the marketplace. This is a schizoanalytic process that, while disturbing, ultimately leads to a place of greater productive capability.

The disorientating sequence of Nikki walking through the door shows that Lynch’s thresholds and passageways provoke deterritorialisation. They do not lead to a new coherent reality and reformation of subjectivity, but to an extended abject zone of exception. Subjectivity is split (like the boy who creates an evil shadow by crossing the doorway), and this allows two realities, or timelines, to coexist. This accounts for how Nikki can interrupt her own rehearsal. However, when Devon comes to search for her, he cannot see into her world—he sees only empty movie sets—and she cannot see him: she sees an entirely new location.

The extended abject zone compiled of a network of doors, rooms, corridors, and identities. The pink room containing the Valley Girls acts as a hub for all these fragments of

location and character. Nikki's first encounter with these women sets the tone for her stay in the abject alleyway. The elusive questions posed by these women prime Nikki for her coming self-exploration and invite the audience into a position of open vulnerability and self-questioning. Her responses tend to be non-rational and purely affective, as shown through repeated close-ups of her tears. The audio-visual assault on the viewer's senses by the lighting that obscures and shocks is an exploitation of this vulnerable and reflexive state. This taps into the potential offered by cinematic individuation. The tension—or marriage—between diegetic and non-diegetic sound and music pre-empts the celebrations of assemblage that are to come. Each time the narrative returns to the pink room, the Valley Girls perform different dance routines that show the development of Nikki's sense of social multitude.

Dance Dance Revolution

A slow-motion hand-held pan reveals the pink room. The sound is muffled and distorted, as if someone were jogging a microphone. Static medium close-ups pick out Nikki and one of the Valley Girls. 'It's the shits', she declares. 'I really thought you would last, you two', speaks another, in a low angle close-up as she smokes a cigarette whilst lying on the floor. The camera cuts to a three-shot of some other Valley Girls lounging on a sofa, smoking. 'I saw it coming', one says as an excessively loud train's whistle is heard. 'He was the one', says yet another woman, lying supine on the floor, and shot from above.

This montage of draped, lazing, bodies, and ennui laden comments continues. The women boast about their looks. The film eventually frames three of them symmetrically: one on the floor between two others in armchairs. The woman on the floor starts to sing: 'you gotta swing your hips now'. All three women snap their fingers. This is heard non-diegetically as all other ambient sound fades out. The camera cuts to Nikki's confused

reaction, then to a woman showing off her breasts, then back to Nikki. In a sound bridge a drumroll leads into a cut to all the women dancing in a three-by-three square to Little Eva's 'Loco-motion' (1962). They dance in a somewhat scrappy synchronised formation. Strobe lighting flashes in the already brightly lit room [fig. 3.18]. They are framed in either a wide, and slightly high, angle shot, or in a birds-eye-view directly from above. After the line, which they all mime along to, 'you gotta swing your hips now', all the women suddenly vanish. The music abruptly halts, and the room is empty.

Figure 3.18. In the first dance, the Valley Girls dance to Little Eva's 'Loco-motion' in the pink room.

For much of this part of *Inland Empire*, the Valley Girls perform as an inane Greek chorus. The tired breakup comforts they offer—'I saw it coming', 'he was the one' etc.—echo the fact that the narrative of *Inland Empire* is too incoherent to narrate in an orthodox fashion. These also contain an element of mockery; what seems complex for the viewer is reduced to romance clichés by this gang. The Greek chorus represents a classical literary form of explication and commentary, and Lynch frames the figures in symmetrical and static tableaux that evoke classic figurative painting. The commentary of this chorus, however,

merely smears on an extra layer of narrative mud. The comparing of, and boasting about, their bodies provokes laughter and glee amongst the chorus. The viewer, along with Nikki, may be compelled to think of these bodies as exploited, and as depressing products of capitalism (spending money on physical augmentation to more effectively sell your body).

The scene setup is that of sapping entropy. But, by deploying a similar audio-visual disconnection as used in the *Sylvia North* audition sequence in *Mulholland Drive*, Lynch turns the scene into a creative assemblage. Rather, he does the opposite of the *Sylvia North* sequence, where the artificiality of the scene was gradually revealed. Here, 'Loco-motion' is initially sung diegetically, but the synchronised finger snap is shifted to the non-diegetic score, and all other sound is muted. Given that the chorus' previous comments were disjointed (none of them are in answer of, or addressed to, anyone), this is a sudden moment of teamwork. Nikki is shown the dreary world of solipsism, and then provided with an alternative. The 'Loco-motion' dance is joyful, and the routine is coherent. The camera position for this sequence shows all the women [fig. 3.18]. There is no division or exclusion through cutting or framing.

In a sense, this alternative is artificial: the sound being non-diegetic, and the movement being a clear performance. Again, the question arises as to whether an artificial performance is less authentic than a necrotic 'reality'? The sudden disappearance of the women in the midst of the dance suggests that this sequence is a kind of vision to show Nikki the possibilities of collective individuation, and the further dance sequences propose that performance contains the potential to become actualised identity. It is telling that the women vanish after putting their hands on each other's hips. Nikki is not ready for an assemblage comprised of so many bodies, as she is still clinging to her ego; she has not embraced her new abject status. Ultimately, *Inland Empire* shows how the concepts we think of as 'reality' and 'identity' are only ever, themselves, performances.

After the ‘Loco-motion’ dance, a scene where Nikki (or Susan) tells her husband that she is pregnant occurs. Following this, the film cuts to the second dance sequence. Back in the pink room, the women have reappeared. The only light source is a disco ball that sends lights spinning around the room. Unlike the symmetrical framing of the first dance, the camera is hand-held. The women are performing in a circle to Etta James’ ‘At Last’ (1960). They mime snapping their fingers, which is heard clearly on a separate track of the score from ‘At Last’. They put their right hands on the left shoulders of the woman in front of them and move in a circle [fig. 3.19]. The screen fades to black, and the next shot shows Nikki/Susan getting out of bed. The song has continued in a sound bridge, but slowly fades out.

Figure 3.19. In the second dance, the pink room women dance to Etta James’ ‘At Last’.

The aesthetics of this sequence are much looser than with the first dance. Gone is the fixed camera position, high-key lighting, symmetrical framing, and synchronised movement; in its stead is hand-held filming, near darkness, and a casual semi-improvised form of dancing. This circumvents the fascist aesthetics that Siegfried Kracauer diagnosed in mass

synchronised movement.[72] Kracauer suggested that representations of choreography which display a high degree of synchronicity invoke a dynamic sublime that overrides the viewer's critical faculties—so mesmerised are they by the machinic effort and skill displayed by the performers. To be aesthetically fascist does not inherently infer political or moral fascism. It is more that fascist aesthetics are so often adopted by fascist regimes (and by totalitarian regimes on the other side of the political spectrum). Case in point: Leni Riefenstahl's depiction of the mass Nuremberg Rally in *Triumph des Willens* [*Triumph of the Will*, 1935] and her body fetishism of the athletes competing in the 1936 Berlin Olympics in *Olympia* (1938). There is an innate viewing pleasure in fascist aesthetics (classical ballet or a chorus line perhaps)—but when it is subverted through 'loose' choreography, the viewer can be made aware of the spell which has been cast over them.[73]

The second dance is shot in a long-take, the camera sways in and out—as do the dancers. This lends the viewer the impression of being a part of the dancing assemblage, or at least forces their vision to sway with the music and the other bodies. The absence of cuts, and the murky lighting, avoid the distancing effect of the first dance—where the viewer is given an inhuman god's eye view. Yet, when the women touch each other, as in the first dance, the camera/viewer is excluded from the circle [fig. 3.19]. This is frustrating, but it is a necessarily abject experience that the viewer, just like Nikki, must undergo. The sequence ends with Nikki/Susan waking up. As with the vanishing dancers in the previous scene, she is not ready to join the assemblage due to her continued dependence on her ego. The scene collapses without her compliance and is rendered as a dream or vision.

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[72] See Siegfried Kracauer, '*Ornament der Masse* [The Mass Ornament, 1927]', in *The Mass Ornament*: *Weimar Essays*, ed. Thomas Y. Levin (London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 75 – 86.

[73] Dance choreographers such as Pina Bausch and William Forsythe deconstruct the tropes of classical ballet to both engage their audience's critical faculties, provoke laughter, and to reconstruct their performances into something new.

The third dance takes place to no music, rather to a soundscape of grating noises accompanied by disorientating visuals. A series of superimpositions and fades show Nikki sitting in a thunderstorm blurring into Susan sitting in the pink room. Thunder and lightning rage, and a high-pitched scraping sound overwhelms the soundtrack. Shallow focus lights bob in the foreground, and occasional burning filament tracks course across the screen. The camera sways in and out of Susan's terrified face. In the reverse dollies, and when the strobe lighting flashes, the Valley Girls can be seen dancing behind her [fig. 3.20]. The screen violently shakes, and it becomes difficult to make out any distinct picture. Susan gives a distorted scream, and the film cuts to the Valley Girls standing in a line, outside on a street [fig. 3.21]. 'Helloooo!' they shout in unison as the camera pans across their faces.

Figure 3.20. The third dance is a kind of schizoanalytic breakdown.

Figure 3.21. This breakdown is in fact a breakthrough, which leads Nikki/Susan into the next stage of assemblage.

This scene starts with alternating shots of Nikki and Susan sitting in chairs. The resulting storm/dance/breakdown is the effect of Nikki accepting the co-existence of her other performed identities and, with that, the existence of other potential worlds. For the viewer, this scene works in a similar fashion to the climax of *Mulholland Drive*. The more they try to comprehend the visuals and sounds, the more distressing they will find the cacophony (the more you struggle, the tighter the python constricts). There are three planes of images superimposed over each other during the sequence: the room, the street lights, and another light source that is manipulated to cause laser-like effects. The viewer is unable to take in all this visual information at once as their gaze is constantly shifting from one plane to another. It is nearly impossible to focus merely on one plane of the image due to the vigorous vibration of the camera. This is the final breakdown of the viewer's and Nikki's sense of subjectivity that will allow them to break through.

This is the first time that Nikki (Susan) has been in shot with the dancers. She looks at them, finally wanting to join their collective performance [fig. 3.20]. Her intense scream is

matched by a close-up of her *noh*-mask like face [fig. 3.21] which fades into the Valley Girls standing in the street. In *noh* theatre, wide-mouthed and expressionless masks cover an actor's face in order to accentuate their gestural communications. In *Inland Empire*, Nikki's 'loss of face' also leads to a liberation of her physical performance that is based more on gesture. In his work on gesture, Vilém Flusser addresses the gesture of turning a mask around. When I turn my mask around the world sees what it discerns to be my true face, and I see how others have perceived me. Like, Nietzsche's 'powers of the false', the '"wrong" side of the mask is the genuine one because it exposes the fraud.'[74] Here, and as described in the proceeding section, Nikki's visage is replaced by masks which destabilise her authentic face. Flusser writes that this gesture 'is beyond good and evil [note the reference to Nietzsche]. The gesture is fundamentally a move beyond theatre, past the stage, the act, the plot, and it is one of the very few gestures in which the untheatrical, posthistorical form of being finds expression.'[75] This move beyond the narrative confines of the plot leads to political and ethical insights. A view which complements Giorgio Agamben's argument that 'because cinema has its centre in the gesture and not in the image, it belongs essentially to the realm of ethics and politics (and not simply to that of aesthetics)'.[76] However, if we follow Flusser, it requires a significant gesture (e.g. the mask turning) to provoke the awareness of the power of cinematic gestures.

Nikki/Susan has 'at last' been permitted to leave the private confines of the pink room for the public space of the street. The drawn-out greeting, declaimed in unison by the chorus, is Nikki's welcome into their street assemblage. Nochimson suggests that Nikki 'surrenders to the larger forces around her, he [Lynch] makes her experience a model for letting go of the narrow limits set by the most constricting aspects of our society that foreclose our full

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[74] Flusser, *Gesten: Versuch einer Phänomenologie* [*Gestures*, 1991], 94.
[75] Flusser.
[76] Agamben, *Mezzi senza fine* [*Means Without Ends*, 1996], 56.

potential as people.'[77] By 'letting go', Nikki can fully immerse herself into her various performances. This is also a process of schizoanalysis, that leads to a further breakthrough when Nikki confronts (and turns around) the various 'masks' of the nefarious Phantom.

Face/Off

Nikki must go through a further schizoanalytic process in order to emerge as a changed and positive character. Through her encounters with the threatening hypnotist, the Phantom, she is confronted with several terrifying visages. The first occurs in a vision. Nikki is seen running in slow-motion along a path which leads to the camera's fixed position. As she nears the camera, a jump-cut suddenly puts her in close-up. She is over-lit, and her mouth is disturbingly wide [fig. 3.22].

Figure 3.22. Nikki's distorted face during her horrifying vision.

[77] Nochimson, *Lynch Swerves*, 125.

Nikki's showdown with the Phantom, behind the movie theatre, sees her shoot him several times at point blank range. The gunshots do not seem to harm him; rather, they cause his face to change. First, it changes to an even more horrific version of that in fig. 3.22 [fig. 3.23]. Finally, it changes to a ghastly clown-like face with blood pouring from its mouth [fig. 3.24], a nightmarish negative image that might correspond to Flusser's 'prohibited side of the mask'.[78]

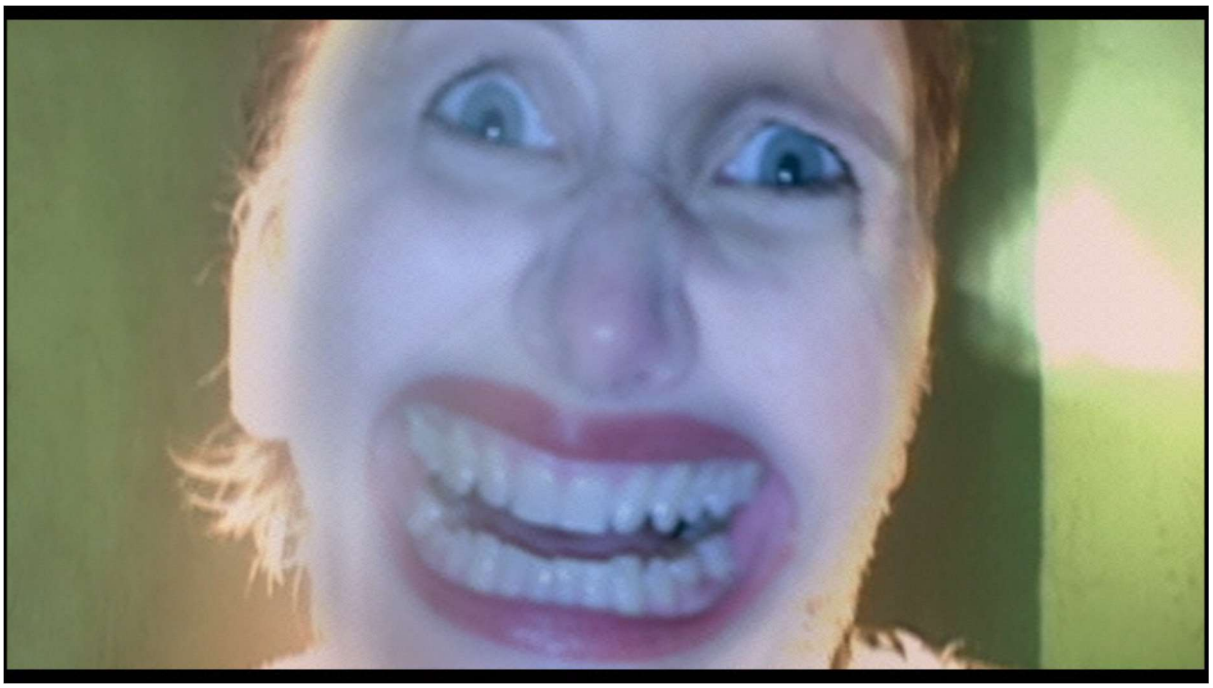

Figure 3.23. When Nikki shoots the phantom, his face turns into a distorted version of her own.

[78] Flusser, 94.

Figure 3.24. She shoots him again and causes this horrific and empty apparition.

This startling encounter segues into the final ‘rabbits’ sequence. The door to their room is shown to be open, and Nikki enters through it. She cannot see the rabbits. David Lynch and Chrysta Bell’s dreamlike ‘Polish Poem’ (2006) plays on the score, and the film cuts to the Lost Girl from the film’s opening. On the TV she sees two of the Valley Girls running down a corridor, hand-in-hand. As they run past the camera position (within the monitor), the viewer can see their elated expressions. The Lost Girl’s monitor changes to show her watching the monitor which in turn shows her watching the monitor, and so on. In the monitor, Nikki enters the room. The Lost Girl stands to meet her [fig. 3.25], and both women’s shadows fall across the TV screen. The film cuts to the camera position shown on the screen. Nikki kisses the Lost Girl and gradually fades away [fig. 3.26]. After Nikki disappears, the Lost Girl is now able to leave the room via the door that Nikki entered through. She travels along a corridor, down some stairs, along another corridor, and through a series of doors. Finally, she encounters a man (Peter J. Lucas) and a boy (Brandon Reinhardt). The three joyfully embrace.

Figure 3.25. The Lost Girl's TV shows her meeting Nikki. The monitor in frame left shows the same picture.

Figure 3.26. As Nikki and the Lost Girl kiss, Nikki slowly fades away.

The three grotesque faces that Nikki must confront are all versions of her own countenance but are incrementally more distorted. The first [fig. 3.22] shows her stretching her mouth as far as is humanly possible. Aside from the fish-eye effect—which is not unique to this scene—and the over saturated lighting, there is no overt manipulation of the image.

Much of the alarm caused by this face is due to the jump-cut, or jump-scare, that thrusts it into close-up. Nevertheless, this mask-like appearance is the full extent to which Nikki's face can be made to appear monstrous, but still a realistically 'human contortion' achievable without special effects or image manipulation.

The second and third masks [figs. 3.23 & 3.24] follow Nikki's acceptance of performance and assemblage. They extend beyond her human capabilities; they are inhuman. This is facilitated through technical means: by her use of the gun within the diegesis, and via Lynch's use of special effects in a practical sense. The second mask is bizarre, but still recognisably Nikki's face. Unsatisfied with this she shoots the Phantom once again and the third mask is revealed. This horrific face is hollow, and the blood pouring out of its mouth shows its inability to retain the stuff of biological life. This shows Nikki's systematic rejection of her sense of self. Not only does she become a blank mask through which a multiplicity of performance choices are unleashed, but through her awareness of the mask she also gains Flusser's ethical and political insights.

Deleuze and Guattari write that 'schizos lose their sense of the face, their own and others', their sense of the landscape, and the sense of language and its dominant significations all at the same time'.[79] This is shown not only by the estrangement of Nikki's encounters with her own face, but by the fact that her face is projected onto that of the Phantom. As we tend to view the face as such a rigid and foundational structure, its collapse allows for *Inland Empire*'s dislocation of time and space to follow in its slipstream. Thus, Nikki and the Lost Girl are suddenly able to freely traverse the thresholds that have imprisoned them for the duration of the film.

Deleuze and Guattari claim a central product of schizoanalysis whereby 'dismantling the face is the same as breaking through the wall of the signifier and getting out of the black

[79] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 219.

hole of subjectivity.'[80] Nikki's face is dismantled, and she relinquishes her subjectivity and accepts abjectness. Now she can move through the nightmarish structures of the alleyway and the marketplace. Lynch shows the Lost Girl trapped within the multiple frames of TV monitors [fig. 3.25]. This is a crystal-image like that in the chat show scene in *New Nightmare* (see Chapter 1). The Lost Girl is trapped within the crystal-image (which nonetheless contains potential). The arrival of the ego-less Nikki releases her from the confinement of the crystal, the frame, and the room. Their kiss is a form of social individuation that allows Nikki to truly self-obliterate [fig. 3.26]. Her sacrifice allows the Lost Girl to reunite with her family and allows Nikki to finally access the palace beyond the marketplace.

Save the Last Dance

The fourth and final dance occurs during the credits. This dance takes place in Nikki's Hollywood mansion, and is filmed hand-held. The scene opens with a one-legged woman on crutches walking into the room and looking around. 'Suuu-weeeet', she intones, and Nina Simone's 'Sinnerman' starts to play on the score. The camera picks out a woman sitting on a chair with a monkey and the actress Laura Harring (voice of one of the rabbits and star of *Mulholland Drive*). Harring blows a kiss which is returned by Nikki, who is sitting next to the actress Nastassja Kinski. A man saws a log in time to the beat of the music. The Valley Girls enter the room and start dancing. A troupe of black female dancers form a separate dance formation. A man plays the piano, harmonising diegetically with the non-diegetic music. When Simone's vocals begin, the leader of the dance troupe (Monique Cash) mimes along [fig. 3.27]. The scene is occasionally lit by strobe lighting. Towards the end of the sequence,

[80]Deleuze and Guattari, 220.

the lyrics repeat the word ‘power’ over and over. High-angle shots of Nikki show her looking up and smiling. The final shot begins as a close-up on Nikki, and then tracks back through all the performers as they vigorously move to the up-tempo drum breakdown of the song’s climax. This is lit by extremely rapid strobe lighting. On the song’s final drum beat, the screen fades to black.

Figure 3.27. A plethora of characters perform to Nina Simone’s ‘Sinnerman’.

Anna Katharina Schaffner summarises Nikki’s experiences in *Inland Empire*:

> Nikki transcends her inauthentic doubles and former selves: her beaten and abused part dies; her glamorous but vacuous film-star self disappears; she no longer cares for applause, praise and admiration; she ends the masquerade, and the end achieves catharsis. Where Fred and Diane [the protagonists from *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*] failed because they remained trapped in their obsessive-destructive fantasy worlds, because they remained entangled in a web of misguided fantasmatic conceptions, because they could not let go of the unobtainable object of desire and their painful longings, Nikki is able to do exactly that by liberating herself from false dialectical conceptions and the symbolic representatives of their creators.[81]

[81] Schaffner, ‘Fantasmatic Splittings and Destructive Desires: Lynch’s *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire*’, 287.

I agree with Schaffner that Nikki achieves a kind of enlightenment through the destruction of her ego. However, the description of doubles and other performed selves as inauthentic is problematic. Following Deleuze and Nietzsche, there is no platonic ideal object; there is no true self. Nikki ascends to catharsis through her embrace of performativity and inauthenticity. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest, the only way to eliminate difference is through a proliferation and acceptance of difference: to the extent that difference ceases to be an issue.[82] Nikki elevates performed identity to the rank of 'true' identity. In the process, she destroys the possibility of 'true' identity (for it no longer matters).

This final dance sequence is a celebration of Nikki's achievement. This is the 'palace' beyond the marketplace. It is a mass assemblage of performing bodies that contains subsets of performing bodies. All these sets are brought into a mass socio-techno individuation by the technical objects that are the camera and Nina Simone's song.

'Sinnerman' is a striking soundtrack choice—as is the decision to let it play for the entirety of its ten-plus minutes duration. Here is a signature song from one of the foremost African American singers—a spiritual song from Simone's childhood in racially segregated North Carolina. Simone was a prominent figure in the civil rights movement and 'Sinnerman' was recorded in the aftermath of two events that deeply shocked her: the Klu Klux Klan's bombing of a Baptist church in Birmingham, Alabama, that caused the deaths of four black girls in September 1963, and the assassination of Malcolm X in February 1965. These tumultuous creative and cultural conditions may offer an indication as to why 'Sinnerman' is so fervent. The lyrics are mantra-like, hypnotic, and filled with troubling symbolism: endless escape, rocks that cannot shelter, bleeding rivers, boiling seas, and desperate pleas to god and the devil. The swung and looping riff trips over itself, always seemingly on the verge of

[82] Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 332.

collapse. The combined effect of the music, the lyrics, and the vocal performance is infernal: the experience of being a black woman in the US in the mid-1960s.

How does this relate to *Inland Empire*? To borrow from the reductive readings of *Mulholland Drive* that obsess over the Hollywood fantasy versus a dank and depressed reality, you could view *Inland Empire* as adhering to a similar structure. The mundane scenes of poverty-stricken desperation are the most 'real' layer of the film as opposed to another escapist Hollywood fantasy (albeit a more nightmarish fantasy than in *Mulholland Drive*). The film depicts a sustained amount of pain, anxiety, and tension experienced by economically left-behind peoples. Susan's monologues about sexual abuse and her sparse and cramped house are the most obvious examples, but we can also see this at play with the Valley Girls, the Polish immigrants, and the black and Asian homeless. The failure of established political institutions to offer anything to these demographics from the 1980s onwards can be partly held responsible for the 'Make America Great Again' platform that plopped an 'outsider' into the White House in 2016. So, both Lynch and Simone, in their own times, are laying down a warning marker of how the United States is tottering on the brink. But most of *Inland Empire* is overwhelmingly abject, whilst 'Sinnerman', although it threatens to collapse, stumbles forward. In fact, if we think in terms of schizoanalysis, collapsing whilst progressing is one way of reconfiguring subjectivity—I may have broken down, but I have still reached my destination.

The only other instances of non-white characters in *Inland Empire* occurs when Nikki, having been stabbed in the gut, lurches down Hollywood Boulevard and collapses in front of three homeless people, a black man, an older black woman, and a Japanese woman. The Japanese woman tells the other woman a story about getting a bus to Pomona to visit a friend who is dying from a 'hole in her vagina wall'. Nikki coughs up blood and 'dies' whilst the black woman consoles her. The film-within-a-film is 'cut' and a camera crew is revealed.

By this stage the indistinct relationship between film and reality means that the revelation of the director calling 'cut' does not really feel like the film is moving through ontological levels—indeed, Nikki will immediately walk off set and into more surreal locations and encounters. This scene might best be understood as the figurative death of Nikki's performance as Susan—the persona she displays in *Inland Empire*'s scenes of impoverished white malaise, and a character who explains in various interview sequences that she has been the subject of terrible abuse at the hands of abject masculinity.

Susan 'dies' in the company of dispossessed Asian and black people. Their street corner situates them ironically next to the Walk of Fame stars that predominantly commemorate white celebrities. Marginalised peoples exist within the epicentres of power (Hollywood), yet are still practically invisible (where are they in the rest of the films in this thesis?). The man barely speaks, the older woman offers only banal or obscure comments, and the younger woman speaks at length, but only to tell a sad and desperate anecdote. Black masculinity does not have a voice here, black femininity has a voice, but nobody listens, and Asian immigrant identity has a voice, but one that can only tell a horror story. The white identity represented by the Susan character feels threatened and entrenched. It turns inward and elects a demagogue. This scene suggests to me that, in the US, the feelings of disenfranchisement, economic precarity, insufficient health care, 'voicelessness', vulnerability, and proximity to uncaring institutions of power are common to all ages, genders, races, and are blind to one's status as an immigrant or a born-and-bred citizen. It is with this realisation that Susan must die, as Nikki no longer has access to or need for this part of her identity.

Lynch's inclusion of 'Sinnerman' in an un-abstracted form (it is one of Simone's most sampled works) gives his film a positive endnote. If much (perhaps the reality) of *Inland Empire* is a diagnosis of the abject white (and often masculine) identityc, then the

ending (perhaps an idealistic fantasy) suggests that the way out of this abject state is through a vast collective celebration of black femininity—signalled here by Nina Simone, and embodied by the black female dance troupe who are prominent in this scene [see fig. 3.27].

Lynch inserts several references to his other films in this scene—the log cutting might refer to *Twin Peaks* or *Blue Velvet*, and Laura Harring stars in *Mulholland Drive*. The presence of Natassja Kinski evokes her role opposite cast member Harry Dean Stanton [who plays 'fixer' Freddie Howard in *Inland Empire*] in *Paris, Texas* (Wim Wenders, 1984). These references provide a nod to the audience that both invites their participation in, and distances them from, the sequence. The rhythmic lighting and the ecstatic music provoke an affective response from the viewer, but this is undercut by the lip-synching. By this point the viewer, like Nikki, now accepts that the lip-synched performance is no more or less 'authentic' than the original performance.

The final shot is a triumph of performed assemblage. The shot starts with a close-up of Nikki and moves through all the other dancers. This shows how Nikki's consciousness extends outwards to take in the mass performance of all her guests. Her 'self' now encompasses all these other performing bodies that make up this social individuation. The lead up to this shot involves mass chanting of the word 'power'. This mantra, and the shot that follows, represent a will to power in that they are a call for life, becoming, transformation, love, collectivity, and performance.

Conclusions

With *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire* respectively, David Lynch first suggests, and then insists, upon the creative potential of abject states. This is the same potential that I originally found in Giorgio Agamben's zones of exception, and in Gilbert Simondon's transindividual.

Thomas Elsaesser's *European Cinema and Continental Philosophy* (2018) posits a cinema of abjection in European filmmaking. Elsaesser proposes this as a thought experiment rather than a real-world struggle—cinema remains a sphere for audiences to work through such issues in theory rather than action.

In a paper delivered at King's College London, Elsaesser promoted the cinema of abjection as supporting interdependence rather than independence, and the recognition of difference. Because abjection necessarily destroys the boundary between subject and object, the notion of independence becomes impossible. Following such a negation of subjectivity, the only course of existence becomes through collaborative collectivity. Lynch's films, and *Inland Empire* in particular, show that performance can be used to access this abject, egoless, state. Nikki's performances do not create inauthentic identities; rather, they prove authentic identity to be a fallacy. Where there is no authentic identity there is no subjectivity, and self-less assemblages can then be formed.

Elsaesser explicitly mentioned Lynch, stating that in his films female depression stands for both the ruin of masculinity, and becomes a position of creativity. This is upheld by *Inland Empire*'s celebrations of abject female assemblages, and the power they contain. Nikki must experience a disturbing process of schizoanalysis, but the result is cathartic and cleansing. Likewise, the audience's experience of watching the film is unsettling and ungrounding, but the end result is similarly uplifting. If the viewer is willing to lose themselves then they too, via cinematic individuation, can become part of the abject party in the palace.

Chapter 4 – Ennui, Pilgrimage, Circuitry, and Magical Thinking in *Somewhere* and *Knight of Cups*

Everywhere I go people are making a mess of their lives. Everyone has his private tragedy. It's in the blood now—misfortune, ennui, grief, suicide. The atmosphere is saturated with disaster, frustration, futility. Scratch and scratch, until there's no skin left. However, the effect upon me is exhilarating. Instead of being discouraged or depressed, I enjoy it. I am crying for more and more disasters, for bigger calamities, grander failures. I want the whole world to be out of whack, I want everyone to scratch himself to death – Henry Miller[1]

Infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith; for only in infinite resignation does my eternal validity become transparent to me, and only then can there be talk of grasping existence on the strength of faith – Søren Kierkegaard[2]

You can check out any time you like,
But you can never leave
– /, 'Hotel California'[3]

So why is it I'm so distraught
That what I'm selling is getting bought
At some point you just can't control
What people use your fake name for
– Father John Misty, 'Leaving LA'[4]

Introduction

In this chapter I move into the 2010s and discover in Sofia Coppola's *Somewhere* (2010) and Terrence Malick's *Knight of Cups* (2015) a type of Hollywood self-representation concerned with stasis and ennui-ridden entropy. Both films are episodic, allowing for a series of loosely connected scenarios and encounters to operate as shifting milieux, as the protagonists seek, consciously or not, a means to escape from a mausoleum-like Los Angeles.

Somewhere follows the unfocused procrastinations of action movie star Johnny Marco (Stephen Dorff), living in the exclusive Chateau Marmont Hotel, who must look after his ten-year-old daughter for a week. In my analysis of the film, I posit the hotel as what Giorgio

[1] Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* [1934], 19 – 20.
[2] Kierkegaard, *Frygt og Bæven* [Fear and Trembling, 1843], 56.
[3] The Eagles, 'Hotel California'.
[4] Father John Misty, 'Leaving LA'.

Agamben termed ‘a zone of indistinction’. Whilst this location encourages a plateauing of productivity, I propose that through Agamben’s reading of Saul/Paul’s *hōs me* (to act/view a condition which you cannot change in an alternative fashion), the abject condition can be reconfigured as a site of productive potential. This brings me back to my previously established framework of Gilbert Simondon and Gilles Deleuze. I posit that Johnny’s lack of drive shows that he has become what Deleuze and Félix Guattari called a ‘body without organs’ [BwO]. The BwO represents the inertia produced by the capitalist system (here embodied by Hollywood), but also produces a clean slate where new counter-capitalist forms and linkages might be forged. The deployment and prominent use of machines in *Somewhere* demonstrate Simondon’s technical objects, which can mediate and evolve humans’ relationships with both technology and with each other.

Knight of Cups portrays the Homeric journey of screenwriter Rick (Christian Bale) across LA with a succession of (often female) companions. The film explicitly evokes several religious journeys such as those undertaken by characters in works by John Bunyan, Suhrawardi, and Thomas the Apostle. I approach the film’s theological trappings using my readings of Friedrich Nietzsche’s ‘eternal return’ from previous chapters, and Søren Kierkegaard’s ‘knight of faith’ who has agency outside of the confines, structures, and rational precepts of the world. I contend that *Knight of Cups* displays repetitive experiments with modes of expression—and by extension a search for a productive mode of living—which are mirrored on a cinematographic level through DP Emmanuel Lubezki’s deployment of a wide variety of filming techniques.

Knight of Cups makes several prominent references to the Tarot, a gnostic and highly symbolic system of divining the ‘secrets’ of the unconscious mind. It is an example of what Simondon termed ‘magical’ thinking: that which sorts the world into an arbitrary symbolic order. Magical thinking evolves into ‘religious’ (how we conceive of the natural world

through metaphor and personification) and 'technological thinking' (the structures that landscape this world). These modes ultimately correspond to Simondon's 'aesthetic thinking' (art/representation that mediates our relationship with, and experience of, the world), which I argue is present in Malick's film. Simondon shows how art is ultimately something that can incite true sociopolitical change—within a social, and technical ensemble. Walter Benjamin describes Paul Klee's painting, *Angelus Novus* (1920), as showing an angel facing the debris of history. The angel wants to fix what has been broken but finds itself being blown incessantly backwards into the future by a storm called progress.[5] For Benjamin this metaphor evoked both the progress and trauma caused by a century that was predicated on modernity and technology. Now, in the twenty-first century, we should cease the futile endeavour of mending the pile of debris. If we are unable to turn around and face the future, then we must try and embrace the magic, religious, and romantic qualities the can come from being 'broken'.

Somewhere

Previous to her debut directorial feature *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), Sofia Coppola was best known for being the daughter of New Hollywood legend Francis Ford Coppola, and for appearing in her uncle's *The Godfather Part III* in 1990.[6] All of Coppola's six feature films—*The Virgin Suicides*, *Lost in Translation* (2003), *Marie Antoinette* (2006), *Somewhere*, *The Bling Ring* (2013), and *The Beguiled* (2017) have been co-produced at American Zoetrope,

[5] See Walter Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte' ['Theses of the Philosophy of History', 1940].
[6] Critical writing about Sofia Coppola often focuses on her as a media personality or her place in the Coppola family dynasty. See Belinda Smaill, 'Sofia Coppola: Reading the Director', *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2013): 148 – 162; and Guy Lodge, 'Sofia Coppola: 'I never felt I had to fit into the majority view', *The Guardian* (2 July 2017), https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/jul/02/sofia-coppola-beguiled-i-never-felt-i-had-to-fit-into-the-majority-view-interview. Sample quote: 'film-makers are not, for the most part, paragons of cool, but Sofia Coppola is different.'

the production company founded by Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas, and now run by Sofia Coppola and her brother Roman. Three of these films (*Lost in Translation*, *Marie Antoinette*, *Somewhere*) were co-produced by Japanese production and distribution company Tohokushinsha; two (*Marie Antoinette* and *Somewhere*) were co-produced with venerable French production company Pathé; three (*Lost in Translation*, *Somewhere*, *The Beguiled*) were distributed by Universal subsidiary Focus Features. Her films, whilst often divisive, always garner a handful of ecstatic reviews and are perennial awards contenders.[7] *Lost in Translation* aside ($119.7 million box office against a budget of $4 million), her films make modest but unexceptionable profits.[8]

Coppola's career is one of consistency—both industrially and creatively. She often re-partners with the same production and distribution companies, and her films tend to produce similar critical and financial performances. On a narrative level, her films deal with a protagonist, or group of protagonists, situated in liminal and tedious milieux. Her cloistered characters (mostly women) live privileged lives—from Marie Antoinette in a doll's house vision of Versailles, to the bored suburban kids in *The Bling Ring*—lusting after the tabloid lifestyles of party girls like Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan. The depiction of these segregated communities displays an interest with what lies outside walls (both physical and invisible). The school in *The Beguiled* is always in contrast with the Civil War raging outside; the vacuum of this idyllic southern estate is broken when a wounded soldier is taken in by the teachers and girls, breaching this divide. In *Lost in Translation*, the sleek and anonymous Park Hyatt Tokyo hotel is a glass obelisk standing serenely against the sensory overload of Shinjuku and the rest of the city that lies beyond its boundaries.

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[7] Coppola won the Academy Award for best adapted screenplay for *Lost in Translation*, and the best director award at the Cannes Film Festival for *The Beguiled*.

[8] *The Virgin Suicides* made $10.4 million with a budget of $6.1 million; *Marie Antoinette* grossed $60 million with a budget of $40 million (Coppola's most expensive film by some margin); *The Bling Ring* made $19.1 million off of a $8 million budget; and *The Beguiled* made $27.4 million with a budget of $10 million.

Somewhere remains faithful to the production methods and narrative styles of Coppola's other films. It was produced at American Zoetrope, Pathé, and Tohokushinsha, and was distributed by Focus. This production and distribution model is, increasingly, becoming a norm for medium budget 'Indiewood' films. The transnational exchange between a variety of studios and companies speaks to the increasing global expansion of Hollywood filmmaking, and also shows how film production outside of the US is feeding back into Hollywood. As film production becomes ever more crosshatched in a framework that sits above and beyond geographical boundaries, so do the ideas of national production, industry, and style become more indistinct. Retrospectively, the shift from the 1990s auteur/indie model explored in Chapter 1 is very noticeable. Companies like New Line Cinema no longer exist (in the same vein) to produce and distribute works from celebrated filmmakers (such as with *Wes Craven's New Nightmare*) that sit on the boundary between mainstream and niche Hollywood. Perhaps it is telling that self-reflexive cinema in the 1990s is more introspective than films from the 2000s and 2010s. The nineties films depict Hollywood (and wider American culture) as a dominant industry. More contemporary self-reflexive work, perhaps due to transnational influence and production conditions, embraces the idea of international culture. Recent self-reflexive films which privilege Hollywood as the dominant industry tend to be period pieces (*Hail, Caesar!*, *Trumbo*, *Rules Don't Apply*), whereas *Somewhere* is a film about Hollywood, filmed in a style that absolutely does not resemble the usual Hollywood product.[9]

Somewhere made $13.9 million on a $7 million budget. As is custom, critical opinion was divided. Notably Roger Ebert awarded the film a full four stars in his review.[10]

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[9] J. M. Tyree explores how Coppola might now be making films aimed at highbrow film streaming sites such as mubi.com rather than the movie going mainstream in 'Searching for Somewhere', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 64, no. 4 (2011): 12 – 16.

[10] Roger Ebert, 'Somewhere', rogerebert.com [http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/somewhere-2010] (accessed 17/08/2017).

Somewhere was an awards success, winning the Golden Lion for best film at the Venice Film Festival. As previously mentioned, the film's narrative is mainly set in the Chateau Marmont Hotel and follows the non-activities of a Hollywood actor. Such a setup is reminiscent of the jet-lagged actor (Bill Murray) stuck in the Park Hyatt Tokyo hotel in *Lost in Translation*; the Coppola trope of entropic cloistering vs. a liberating exterior world. But the encounter between privileged protagonist and 'real world' is never as morally simplistic or romantic as classic Hollywood narratives like *Roman Holiday* (William Wyler, 1953)—where a European Princess (Audrey Hepburn) learns street truths and life lessons from Gregory Peck. In Coppola's films the encounters are marked by chaos, danger, miscommunication, and loss. In this sense, resolutions that are found in Coppola's work are achieved through an embrace of potential trauma—an eagerness to explore the expressive potentials of an abject state.

Coppola claims that the style of *Somewhere* was inspired by Chantal Akerman's lengthy observation of the quotidian routines of a single mother, *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975). Indeed, Coppola is prepared to let scenes of no real narrative significance play out to absurd lengths (the pastimes of a Hollywood actor being somewhat different to those of a Belgian single mother). Tomas Hachard alludes to Akerman's influence by suggesting that 'it is only in *Somewhere* that Coppola's presentation of the passing of time cinematographically matches up with how her characters experience it in the script: as relentless, mundane, and sometimes overbearing' and 'completely lacking in variation.'[11] Leading man Stephen Dorff reveals on a 'making of' featurette that Coppola asked him to watch Peter Bogdanovich's depression-era set *Paper Moon* (1973), for inspiration for how his relationship with his onscreen daughter Cleo (Elle Fanning) should be played. Coppola's references to European art cinema and the New Hollywood period of the 1970s strike me as being an attempt to distance herself from contemporary Hollywood.

[11] Hachard, 'Passing Time: Sofia Coppola's *Somewhere*', 22.

Somewhere could be seen as an homage or a pastiche of the New Hollywood as represented by her father. But the listless and unsatisfied protagonists of films like *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1968), *Five Easy Pieces* (Bob Rafelson, 1970), and *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976), were at least aware of their abjectness. They made efforts, however foolish, to remedy the situation (an affair with Mrs. Robinson, moving to Alaska, planning to assassinate a presidential candidate). So perhaps Coppola is referencing her father's generation only to deem it misguided and outmoded.

A sense of *Somewhere*'s Akerman-esque longueurs can be gained from the monotonous synopsis alone.

Somewhere opens with a static long-take of actor Johnny Marco driving successive laps of a circular tarmac track in a Ferrari. Eventually the car comes to a stop, Johnny gets out, and the opening credit sequence begins. Following this, Johnny is shown inebriated at a party where he falls down a flight of stairs. The next scene shows him lying in bed in his room at the Chateau Marmont watching two sisters, Bambi and Cindy (Kristina and Karissa Shannon) perform a pole dance routine. His left arm is now in a cast, the implication being that he injured himself in the fall. The pole dance routine is poorly coordinated and clinically un-titillating. Johnny falls asleep as it ends. The following scenes show Johnny hanging around the hotel, smoking, drinking, barely interacting with fellow guests or staff, receiving angry text messages, and driving around the Hollywood Hills.

Another depressing pole dance routine is shown. This time, Johnny tries to seduce one of the sisters but gets her name wrong. Johnny wakes up following the dance to find that his ex-partner Layla (Layla Sloatman) has brought their daughter Cleo to spend the day with him. Johnny drives Cleo to her figure skating lesson where he becomes engrossed in her performance, despite originally having been distracted by his phone. He drops Cleo off at her mother's house and drives back to the hotel where his friend Sammy (Chris Pontius) is

throwing a party in Johnny's room. He flirts with a woman (Laura Hastings) and they go into his bedroom. Unfortunately, Johnny falls asleep before they can have sex.

The next day, Johnny's PA Claire (Ellie Kemper) takes him to a press junket for his new film *Berlin Agenda*. There, he is ridiculed by his co-star Rebecca (Michelle Monaghan), with whom he has been sleeping, and provides hesitant answers to journalists' questions. The final question—'Who is Johnny Marco?'—elicits no reply beyond 'um'.

Johnny goes back to the hotel. Smokes, sleeps, wakes up, and drives to a movie studio where a makeup team make a mask of his face. This scene involves Johnny's face being covered in putty and being told to sit still and silent for forty-five minutes. The suggestion here is, at this point in the film, a prosthetic model of Johnny would be no less engaged than the 'real' version (a BwO). Johnny returns to the hotel and receives a massage.[12] The next day he finds Cleo waiting outside his room with suitcases. Johnny, Cleo, and Sammy hang out in the hotel suite playing video games. Layla telephones Johnny to ask him to look after Cleo for a few days.

Johnny takes Cleo on a press trip to Milan. There, they are treated with absurd deference: an enormous entourage, a police escort, a lavish hotel suite with indoor pool, and a key to the city presented by the mayor. Johnny attends various interviews and TV shows where he struggles with jet-lag and the language barrier.[13] Johnny and Cleo leave Milan earlier than scheduled and fly back to LA. They return to the Chateau Marmont where a concierge called Romulo (Romulo Laki) plays and sings them a song in the lobby.

The next day Cleo makes breakfast for Johnny (who removes his cast) and Sammy. Johnny takes Cleo to buy equipment and clothes for summer camp. On the way back, the Ferrari breaks down. Back at the hotel the pair hang out in and around the swimming pool.

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[12] This scene, in which the masseuse takes his clothes off leading to a 'comedic' misunderstanding, references a similar scene in which a prostitute is sent to Bob Harris' hotel room in *Lost in Translation*.
[13] Again, this is reminiscent of Bob Harris' struggles with Japanese interpreters in *Lost in Translation*.

The car is now fixed, so Johnny drives Cleo to Las Vegas. During the journey, Cleo tearfully tells Johnny she feels neglected by both him and her mother. They arrive in Las Vegas where she watches him shoot craps in a casino. They fly in a helicopter to a taxi waiting to take Cleo to camp. As the cab pulls away, Johnny calls to her 'sorry I haven't been around', but she cannot hear him above the noise of the rotor blades.[14]

Johnny returns to LA and calls Layla, describing himself as 'fucking nothing' during a desperate conversation. Johnny returns to his mundane routine: eating alone, smoking on the balcony, floating in the pool.[15] Johnny calls the front desk and tells them he is checking out. He gets into his car and drives north out of the city. He stops by the side of the road surrounded by deserted fields and walks ahead on foot. The credits roll.

Bodies without Organs in the Hotel California

In *Somewhere*, Coppola depicts the Chateau Marmont Hotel as a physically and psychologically liminal zone of exception: a state defined by Giorgio Agamben as 'a space devoid of law, a zone of anomie in which all legal determinations—and above all the very distinction between public and private—are deactivated.'[16] Indeed, Johnny's parties and drug taking are never under threat from any law enforcement, and while the hotel might cater to a celebrity elite, his own suite is oddly permeable. Characters, and even whole parties, come and go without invitation or acknowledgement. Johnny can leave the hotel, and even the city, but his extended excursions to Milan and Las Vegas ultimately lead to an irresistible urge to get back to his no-place residence. Anna Backman Rogers describes the hotel space as

[14] A reference to similar opening and closing scenes in Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960).
[15] Much like Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman) in *The Graduate*.
[16] Agamben, *State of Exception*, 50.

'disjointed and anonymous and, mirroring this state, any existence played out within this realm is one divested of the personal or particular.'[17]

A hotel as an exceptional location is not a new trope in cinema. The Bates Motel in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and the Overlook Hotel in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) are examples of how hotel spaces have been exploited for uncanny possibilities. The Coen Brothers use a Los Angeles hotel as a metaphor for hell in their Hollywood satire *Barton Fink* (1991). Coppola cements the exceptional status of the Chateau Marmont by consistently delineating the sense of its location within LA. This may sound counter-intuitive. If the site of exception is thus set into the wider accepted milieu, then can it truly be a place apart from this established location? Coppola achieves two effects by presenting the hotel thusly (it is also very telling that she chooses a real and operational hotel rather than the gothic inventions of the previously mentioned films). Firstly, she situates her zone of exception as a place within, rather than a place outside of, an established society. Otherworldly liminal spaces can be mined for ghoulish potentials, but they remain safely compartmentalised—zones we only encounter should we choose to. When a zone of exception is located within the presumed stability of the established order it is instantly more insidious, and potentially much more destabilising as it ceases to exist safely 'elsewhere'. We no longer have any agency as to whether we encounter it; this can be forced upon us purely by chance.

Secondly, by embedding the hotel so fully into its LA surroundings, Coppola shows how the zone of exception and the sphere of the mainstream are intrinsically linked. Any drawing of a boundary inherently has the consequence of creating a remainder. A city is not an airtight design which utilises all available space—it leaves geographical and sociological gaps within itself, as well as outside of its boundaries (which themselves are often hard to

[17] Backman Rogers, *American Independent Cinema*, 125.

define). The exterior shots of the Chateau Marmont clearly establish its location on Sunset Boulevard, and the interior shots (including those within the grounds of the hotel) avoid any glimpse of the outside world. The effect of this is to turn the façade of the hotel, which is seen in exterior shots, into an overt depiction of an actual physical boundary between zones of inclusion and exclusion. The Sunset Strip (where the hotel is located) is itself a zone of transition. It is a threshold between the elite Beverly Hills neighbourhood to the West, and the grittier, more urban, West Hollywood to the East.

The zone of exception that lies within, rather than without, the established order is key for how Agamben conceives of its political necessity and potential: 'the state of exception actually constituted, in its very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested.'[18] Each status—belonging and rejected—relies on the other to define itself. There can be no centralised power, or established majority, without the inverse with which such hegemonic concepts contrast themselves—and vice-versa. Agamben posits that this means that 'exception and example are correlative concepts that are ultimately indistinguishable and that come into play every time the very sense of the belonging and commonality of individuals is to be defined.'[19] By this configuration, the terms of who and what is excluded are constantly oscillating. In practical terms (as there are obviously groups that always tend to hold power and others who tend to become marginalised), the established centre can never be imagined without its excluded other, making the two inextricable, resulting in that which is excluded becoming an intrinsic part of the central locus of acceptability and power.

Such zones of exception can be the anodyne limbos as described by Backman Rogers, but they also correspond to what Gilles Deleuze described as 'the originary world': 'the overflowing location where the whole film happens, that is, the world which is revealed as

[18] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 9.
[19] Agamben, 22.

the basis of the social milieux'.[20] For there are always two sides to a zone of indistinction: the formless site of lost identity, and the site where structures are broken down and reconstituted as something new. In art, such spaces can become vessels of expressive potential; productive rather than entropic. Deleuze warns that 'the originary world is a beginning of the world, but also an end of the world, and the irresistible slope from one to the other'; it makes the milieu 'a closed world … or else opens it up on to an uncertain hope.'[21] The world that ends by sliding into another can be witnessed in David Lowery's 2017 film *A Ghost Story*, in which the death of a man (Casey Affleck) leads to his bed sheet-covered spirit experiencing the end of time before returning to a point several centuries before his original existence. The ghost is tied to a location, and he watches as different structures and peoples come and go.[22] In this sense it is the trace of the original natural landscape which is always seeding new milieux.

As to which of these dialectically opposed outcomes (closed or open) is achieved appears to be very much a matter of perspective. For Deleuze, naturalist artists and thinkers (I would include Backman Rogers in this group) 'could only grasp the negative effect of time; attrition, degradation, wastage, destruction, loss, or simply oblivion.'[23] If one thinks of time as linear and procedural, then zones of indistinction and circular motifs become inherently nihilistic. For those who see time as shattered or circular, then, repetition and indistinction become concepts invested with deep reservoirs of potential. The former is an anthropocentric view that sees the cessation of human civilisation as the ultimate end point, whilst the latter (including filmmakers like Lowery and philosophers like Nietzsche) see a new kind of world in the end of this one.

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[20] Deleuze, *Cinema I*: *The Movement Image*, 142.
[21] Deleuze, 142.
[22] *A Ghost Story* is akin to Richard Maguire's graphic novel *Here* (2014) which traces the history of the corner of a room between the years 500,957,406,073 BC and 2313 AD in a non-linear and overlapping temporality.
[23] Deleuze, *Cinema I*, 144.

The *loup garou*

Coppola focuses on one particular inhabitant of the hotel/zone of indistinction: action star Johnny Marco. Johnny moves between the realm of the hotel and the outside world—although his excursions are either aimless drives or work obligations where he is manoeuvred by publicists and to which he applies minimal efforts. Backman Rogers writes that in 'a film made up of "in-between" moments…. [he] is an inherently liminal character.'[24] His life is what Agamben would describe as that of a bandit: 'a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, exclusion and inclusion: the life of the bandit is the life of the *loup garou*, the werewolf, who is precisely *neither man nor beast*, and who dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither.'[25]

This animal part of Johnny's life is shown through his perfunctory carnality: the drab meals and drabber sex that are the strongest connection to Coppola's claimed *Jeanne Dielman* influence. His human part is shown through his work obligations: occasions he endures blankly. This existence is that of a minor people as expounded by Deleuze. This is to say, 'not so much a matter of minorities as a presentation of the people as being always left over with relation to a division, something which remains or resists division—not as a substance, but as an interval.'[26] As I expanded upon in the introduction, Deleuze's use of 'minor' is problematic, and as a rich white man living in California, Johnny does not fit into most definitions of a minority group. Technically, film stars are a comparatively small group, but in the same way that the 1% are not subjugated by the remaining 99% (yet) they cannot reasonably claim minority status. This suggests that minority status is not limited to numerical supremacy and, as often the case, is associated with power, money, and privilege.

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[24] Backman Rogers, *American Independent Cinema*, 116.
[25] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 105.
[26] *Vacarme*, '"I am sure that you are more pessimistic than I am…": An Interview with Giorgio Agamben', 122 – 123.

In Deleuze's deployment of the term, 'becoming minor' is anything that runs counter-to, or disrupts, mainstream life and society. Werewolf Johnny finds himself caught betwixt-and-between his personal life, his working life, his habitation, and his needs. He has ceased to be productive on any level. He has become the state of zero intensity that Deleuze and Félix Guattari termed the 'Body without Organs'.

Deleuze and Guattari refer to the BwO as 'the ultimate residuum of a deterritorialised socius.'[27] Picture a white-collar worker sitting at the same desk each day, commuting on the same train at the same time, eating the same lunch at the same branch of the same chain of sandwich shop, sleeping and waking on the clock, performing the same gym routine at the same time three evenings a week. Such a life easily becomes lived on autopilot and the routine installs a kind of mechanical rhythm into a person. In this manner, the BwO represents the endgame situation for subjects living under the auspices of globalised capitalism: an anesthetised state of entropy ('the wilderness where the decoded flows run free, the end of the world, the apocalypse').[28] The positive side of this condition is that such a state of deterritorialisation holds great potential for reterritorialisation—it might be helpful to think of two kinds of BwO, one good and one bad. If the subject can overcome their utter absence of productive drive—no easy feat—then the BwO can become a blank canvas. Deleuze and Guattari write that 'at capitalism's limit the deterritorialised socius gives way to the body without organs, and the decoded flows throw themselves into desiring-production.' But 'desiring-production' requires a catalyst, given that the BwO is disabled, and cannot self-start. The BwO may be 'traversed by potentials' and 'marked by thresholds', but it needs help in order to 'give birth to a new humanity or a glorious organism.'[29]

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[27] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 46.
[28] Deleuze and Guattari, 204.
[29] Deleuze and Guattari, 103, 29.

Deleuze and Guattari offer a visualisation of the BwO as a person without orifices: mouth and anus sewn up, ears and nostrils blocked. Nothing can enter in or out of this sealed organism. Johnny is literally shown in such a state in a scene where a mould is taken of his face. He is instructed to sit still for a significant amount of time whilst the putty which covers his face sets. Johnny obligingly sits doing absolutely nothing for forty-five minutes of narrative time [fig. 4.1]. The BwO is as much a psychological state as it is a physical one. Thus, escaping its clutches does not necessarily require any tangible rupture. Deleuze and Guattari clarify that 'dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels, and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity'.[30] It is then a subtle change in attitude, positioning, and thinking that provides passage out of the BwO, or the ability to live with it, or even to utilise it. 'Too violent an action', say Deleuze and Guattari, and 'instead of drawing the plane you will be killed, plunged into a black hole'.[31]

Figure 4.1. Johnny sits with his face coated in modelling clay in the prosthetics studio.

[30] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 185 – 186.
[31] Deleuze and Guattari, 187.

Johnny's gentle catalyst arrives in the form of his daughter Cleo. Cleo is herself a deterritorialised character. Her immediate milieu is a waiting period of zero obligation before she goes to summer camp; abandoned with her near-catatonic non-entity father for an undefined period of time. Together, Johnny and Cleo form a social assemblage which allows them to recognise and restart each other's production drives. Deleuze and Guattari predict that it is only in such social ensembles 'that the BwO reveals itself for what it is: connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities.'[32] They can lose their forms and appearances and return to potential energies. Through analyses of sequences from the beginning, middle, and end of *Somewhere*, I can show how this process plays out.

The Racetrack

Being an LA story, cars are prevalent in *Somewhere*. Coppola extends the audience's experience of duration, and pays homage to global cinematic new waves, by giving precedence to the dead time spent driving for pleasure and commuting. These moments of passage, linkage, and manoeuvring—usually alluded to through cuts—are shown at repetitive length. Fittingly, the film is bookended by car scenes.

The first scene segues from the production credits (white text on black screen) with a sound bridge of the engine of a sports car. When the noise reaches its peak, the image cuts in to show a black car shooting past the fixed camera position. When this blur of colour has passed out of shot, the viewer is able to process the scene. A partial view of a racetrack in a sparse desert landscape fills the bottom third of the screen. The top two thirds display a vast and cloudy sky [fig. 4.2]. Johnny's car is seen on the top straight in the distance, and when it

[32] Deleuze and Guattari.

flashes past the camera in the foreground at the start of each loop. On the completion of his fourth lap (since the start of the scene) Johnny stops the vehicle in front of the camera position, gets out, and stands next to the car looking offscreen [fig. 4.3]. The screen cuts back to black and the main title appears.

Figure 4.2. The opening static shot shows displays a racetrack, a desert, and a horizon in a series of abstract lines.

Figure 4.3. The introduction of Johnny Marco creates a bathetic contrast: the movie star and his expensive toy dwarfed by the horizontal lines of the landscape.

The scene sets out the stakes of the film with a didactic metaphor: Johnny is going in circles in a barren desert. He may be travelling at speed, and in luxury, but he is still failing to make any significant progress towards anything in particular. This is not Nietzsche's eternal return to that which differs but is the continual circuit of one's own interior state: a BwO. The relatively long duration of the scene (one minute and fifty-eight seconds) allows the spectator to study the composition of the frame in detail. The observant viewer might count ten distinct lines, or layers, running horizontal across the frame. A bottom line of dirt cuts across the corner of screen right; a strip of tarmac runs from the frame left corner to frame right; a thick band of scrub narrows as it approaches frame left; a slender stretch of road appears to converge offscreen with the lower track section; a thin line of desert sits beneath the horizon line, the different shade of which suggests a tree line and higher ground; beyond this the sky is divided into a blue strip, a cloud bank, a third section of mixed clear and cloudy sky, and a top section of cloud. The more you look at this gradated image, the more abstract it becomes. The result could be described as a multivalent Mark Rothko painting—especially if one further abstracts the ten lines into two sets (top four and bottom six). The effect of this is to create a series of lines, of which Johnny is travelling along. Some of the lines diverge, and some converge, whilst others are parallel.[33]

Backman Rogers channels Deleuze to propose that Johnny 'seeks a *line of flight* out of his stultified world that is held together by clichés and reiteration.'[34] The opening image presents ten lines upon which Johnny might journey. Unfortunately, the two lines he is travelling upon happen to be linked into a loop. The postulate of my line interpretation is that there are other lines that exist within, above, below, and next to the path one treads. Thus, one's route or position need not be radically different in order to have a radically different destination. The climax of the scene sees a frustrated Johnny stop driving and stare into the

[33] Although in Euclidean geometry even parallel lines meet at infinity.
[34] Backman Rogers, *American Independent Cinema*, 115.

distance. He seems to recognise that this track is getting him nowhere and looks for a different way. The vast horizontal lines create a perspective illusion whereby Johnny and the Ferrari appear squashed and small—mocking the cliché of the bored playboy in his fast car.

In contrast, the final scene of the film sees Johnny leave the hotel and drive out of the city. Eventually he abandons his car by the side of the road and walks on ahead. The framing of this is markedly different to the opening circuit: a close-up reverse track follows Johnny as he walks away from his car. The compositional lines are now vertical, lending him greater height rather than squashing him [fig. 4.4]. Backman Rogers writes that 'if the film opens with the motif of circularity, it ends with that of a straight line towards an expanding horizon and an open future.'[35] By leaving the spaces of self-exclusion—the hotel, the city, the car—Johnny can now begin again on the blank and empty canvas of the desert.

Figure 4.4. Johnny relinquishes the safety of the hotel, the city, and finally his car to head off into an unknown but promising future.

[35] Backman Rogers, 133.

The Ice Rink

This scene takes place after Johnny has been charged with looking after Cleo for the day. He drives her to a deserted ice rink, which is shown to be standing in a empty carpark. Inside the rink, a long shot shows Cleo being positioned on the ice by her instructor (Renée Roca). The instructor calls for music—'Cool' by Gwen Stefani (2004)—which immediately starts, and Cleo begins her routine [fig. 4.5]. The camera cuts to a close-up of Johnny sitting by the side. He is texting on his phone, eyes down. He glances up and the camera cuts back to Cleo. A reverse shot takes us back to Johnny who puts his phone away. The camera cuts back to Cleo who continues her dance before a cut to Johnny who is glancing down at his phone [fig. 4.6]. Again, he looks up at Cleo and the camera cuts back to show her pull off some impressive manoeuvres. A subtle axial-cut moves the camera into a tighter three-quarter framing of Cleo [fig. 4.7]. This shot tracks Cleo for forty-four seconds, the longest shot in the scene. The camera cuts to Johnny, his attention now fully engaged by his daughter's performance [fig. 4.8]. The camera cuts back to another lengthy three-quarter tracking shot of Cleo (thirty-nine seconds) during which she dances and skates in synchronisation with the music. The camera cuts back to Johnny whose mouth is slightly open, perhaps in impressed surprise. The camera cuts back to Cleo who brings her routine to an end and curtsies toward Johnny. The camera cuts to Johnny applauding and nodding in approval before a reverse shot shows Cleo smiling.

Figure 4.5. Cleo performs in a long shot.

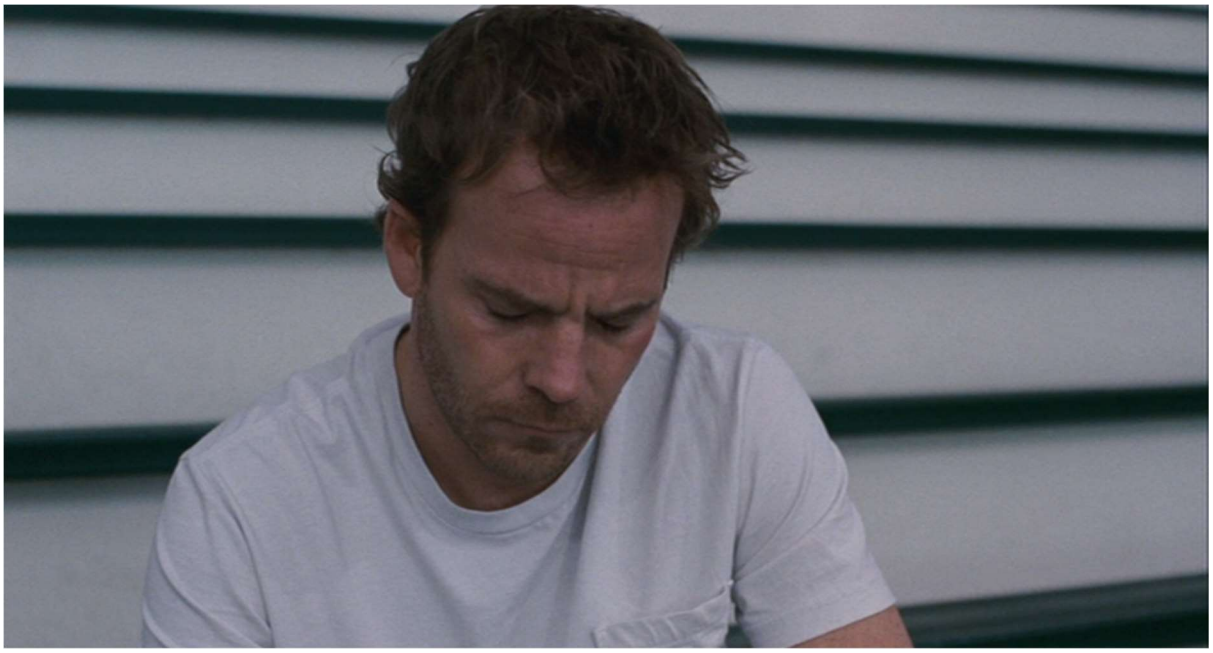

Figure 4.6. Johnny is distracted by his phone.

Figure 4.7. When the camera cuts back to Cleo the framing is tighter: a three-quarter shot.

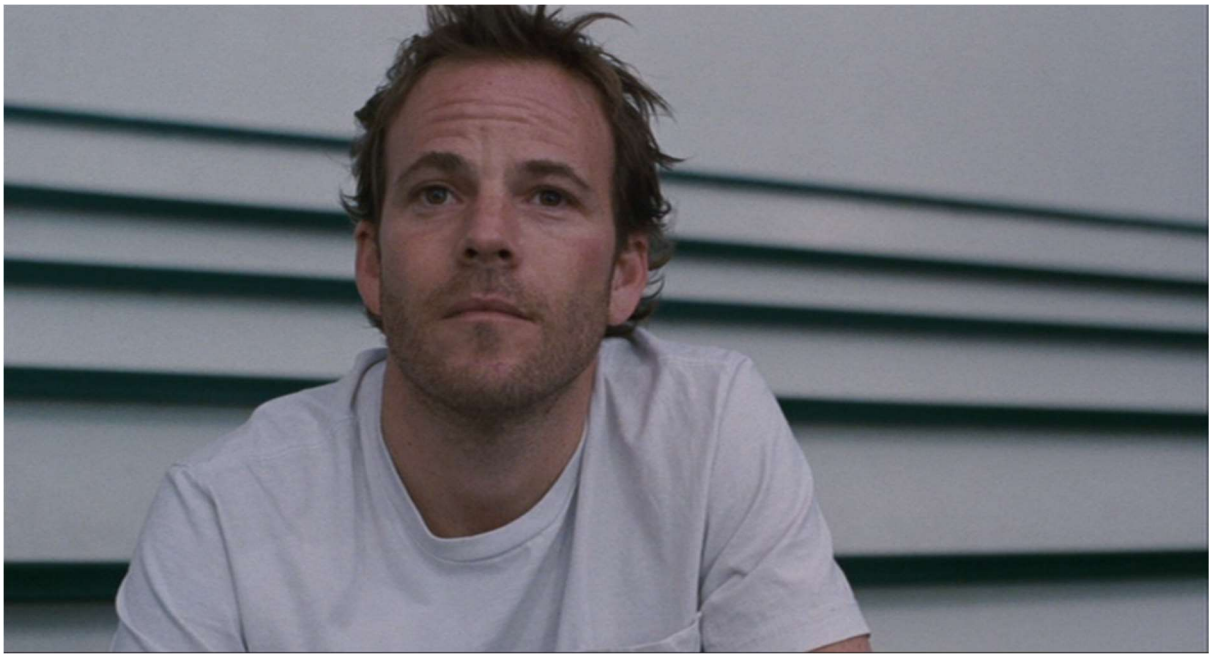

Figure 4.8. The camera's closer attention is mirrored by Johnny, who now cannot help but watch.

Backman Rogers outlines that 'we experience visually and sonically the emotional distance Johnny cannot navigate. Subjectivity and objectivity are blurred' in 'an environment in which surface is rendered as depth and depth as surface … an experience in which the film

viewer too can surrender to "the passive joys of identity loss".'[36] This is true of scenes previous to the arrival of Cleo: the clinically unstimulating pole dancing numbers, the head prosthesis, or the awkward press junket. The presence of Cleo is that of an interloper who punctures the sealant of the BwO. This is shown through the cinematographic structures of this skating scene.

On Backman Rogers' 'surface' level, the performance is comparable to the opening scene as both Johnny and Cleo trace circuits onto a sparse landscape. In another, more perverse, sense, it correlates to the pole-dancing routines. Both Backman Rogers ('reiteration') and Hachard ('lacking in variation') complain that repetition in *Somewhere* is deployed purely to symbolise inertia. Whilst my analysis of the opening scene adheres to this interpretation, I believe that the skating sequence evolves the metaphor. Cleo may be moving in circles, but her gestures and manoeuvres within this set are constantly increasing in complexity.

The initial long shot framing [fig. 4.5] is flat and disengaged—much like the opening racetrack scene. The cutaway shots to Johnny support this viewpoint [fig. 4.6]. Here Backman Rogers' blurring of subjectivity and objectivity holds true. The intended receiver of attention (Cleo) is initially displaced by a technical object (the phone). Coppola frustrates the viewer's desire to circumvent this by sustaining the distance between Cleo and the camera. Unlike the pole dancers, whose performance was uncoordinated and robotic, Cleo's dance is effortful and skilled. There is a high degree of synchronicity between her movement and the rhythm of the music that naturally attracts the audience's attention to her. Likewise, Johnny's glances towards his daughter increase in frequency. The subtle axial cut [fig. 4.7] allows the viewer to fully engage themselves with the performance, but only once Johnny has become fully engaged too [fig. 4.8]. The audience is thus manipulated into sympathising with

[36] Backman Rogers, 128. Backman Rogers is quoting Marc Augé.

Johnny's subjective viewpoint. What is witnessed in this scene is the beginning of the process whereby Johnny will learn to use his abject state of exception to reindividuate his subjectivity.

The action and shot content of the scene are repetitive but significantly different on each circuit. Unlike the racetrack scene, where each lap is the same until a deflated Johnny gives up, the ice rink demonstrates a more progressive conception of Nietzsche's eternal return. 'Not', according to Deleuze, 'that which returns but, on the contrary the fact of returning for that which differs.'[37] The change of track from eternal return as a negation to eternal return as creative is crucial. Deleuze proceeds to write that the positive eternal return 'makes willing a creation, it brings about the equation "willing = creating"'.[38] Thus, the eternal return is repackaged as a form of Saul/Paul's *hōs me*. Agamben describes this as a way for a person to radically change their situation by making use of it: 'do not directly confront power—remain in your juridical condition, your social role—but nevertheless completely transform them in the form of an "as not".'[39] Agamben interprets the subject performing according to *hōs me* [as not] as having a messianic vocation. Being messianic responds to a 'generic potentiality that can be used without ever being owned.'[40] Therefore the *hōs me* stands as an action that is available to everyone, regardless of social positioning.

Johnny Marco may be in a vastly different social condition to the slaves that Saul/Paul writes about, yet a potential escape from his entropy is through the same mechanism as for those who are subjugated. Thus, an adoption of the *hōs me* represents a willingness to fall off his plateau of celebrity. He is movie star 'as not' movie star. Agamben suggests that the messianic vocation 'is a movement of immanence and transcendence, between this world and

[37] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 45.
[38] Deleuze, 64.
[39] *Vacarme*, 'Interview with Giorgio Agamben', 118.
[40] Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, 26.

the future world.'[41] On the level of a presented action, through changes in poise and gesture (aided by a social ensemble), the skating scene is suddenly more positive and productive than similar scenes which have come before. Yet, it also marks a point where Johnny is able to imagine a future world where he has lost the trappings of wealth and fame and is able to conceive of life in such a world as a positive development.

Swimming Pool

A montage of Johnny and Cleo hanging out in the grounds of the Chateau Marmont is scored by The Strokes' 'I'll Try Anything Once' (2006). The pair play table tennis and swim in the pool. A wide-angle medium shot shows them lying side-by-side on sun loungers [fig. 4.9]. 'How you doing?' Johnny asks; 'good' Cleo replies. After holding this shot for several moments, the camera begins to slowly zoom out. As the framing moves through a full shot into a long shot, a man and two children run past in the foreground, dripping wet. As the shot develops into a super long shot more details are revealed. Thick foliage forms a wall of vegetation behind them; a group of sunbathers lie to their left-hand side, and a solitary sunbather to their right. In the foreground, a damp line on the floor gives way to the swimming pool [fig. 4.10]. This entire shot has a duration of one minute and forty-four seconds.

[41] Agamben, 25.

Figure 4.9. The beginning of the shot shows Johnny and Cleo languidly sunbathing.

Figure 4.10. The end of a slow zoom-out shows Johnny and Cleo by the pool amongst some other guests, with a backdrop of plants.

This sequence is the last of several scenes depicting Johnny and Cleo hanging out together at the hotel and follows their curtailed trip to Milan. It forms a resolution of sorts, although it precedes their farewell in Las Vegas, and Johnny's final flight from LA that concludes the film. In contrast to the earlier skating scene, father and daughter now occupy the same frame. As opposed to the attentive camera that leans in at the ice rink, here the

framing moves from tight to wide. The pair have been reconciled spatially, brought together within the technical milieu of the profilmic environment.

Throughout their time together, Johnny and Cleo's relationship is frequently mediated by technical objects. Their most prolonged conversations take place in Johnny's car and, in one instance, a helicopter. Notably, several of their hang out sessions involve playing collaborative video games in Johnny's suite: they duet on *Guitar Hero 5* (2009) and play tennis against each other on *Wii Sports* (2006). This collaborative assemblage of machines and human players corresponds with Simondon's rejection of dualist oppositions between humans and machines, as well as his privileging of the role of machines in human culture. He describes our 'technical reality' as being 'rich in human efforts and natural forces, and which constitutes a world of technical objects as mediators between man and nature.'[42] Whilst Cleo and Johnny have become machinic BwOs, the addition of further machines can resolve this problem. Through their compliance with a technical network of gaming, the pair enter into a non-hierarchical operation whereby both players and machines are equally reliant on each other for the game to work successfully. Here is an example of productive loss of subjectivity. The player loses a sense of their own boundaries as they agree to concede agency to the other player, to their in-game avatar, and to the machine. Yet they are still able to perform and create within the bounds of the mediated game world. They are both abject (they have lost their sense of subjectivity) and expressive (within the mediated space).

A particular technical milieu is created by the interaction between humans and machines within the film, but also through filmmaking technique. Our analyses and readings of cinema inherently place us within a technical milieu as we rely on the technical apparatus to mediate our encounter with the onscreen world. Technical objects have the capacity to both reflect, and to return a person's humanity back to them. In Johnny's case, these

[42] Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* [*On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 1958], 15.

machines of varying purposes mediate a return to a filial bond between him and Cleo. This is presented, in turn, to the audience through the technical object of the camera and the film—operating through cinematic individuation. In this shot, the camera can withdraw to the distance that it ultimately does, because the role of mediator has been fulfilled successfully. The length of the zoom allows the viewer time to fully take in the details that are slowly revealed around the stationary central pair: the plants; the fellow sunbathers; the poolside and the water. The audience witnesses the creation of a new milieu for Johnny, one that has been formed with the mediation of technical objects. This milieu ultimately remains within the realm of the zone of indistinction that is the hotel. But, as is seen in the remainder of the film, Johnny now has the wherewithal to let it 'overflow' into the wider city and beyond.

Entity

Backman Rogers concludes that *Somewhere* resonates with:

> The Deleuzian notion of the powers of the false in that it investigates ossified or major categories of identity in order to reveal it as a pernicious falsehood—Hollywood makes possible the adoption of only specific kinds of identity. Perhaps what the film speaks to most strongly is the inherently dishonest nature of this kind of created identity, which shuts out real life and precludes or does not facilitate true becoming in any way. Johnny Marco as a commodity or brand is a definitive and exhaustive entity, but he is *not* a person.[43]

This reading of the powers of the false acknowledges Deleuze's desire to disrupt identity structures that are widely held to be hegemonic and thus authentic, but it neglects to account for the Nietzschean influence of the concept. For Nietzsche, powers of the false—or simulacra—are closely related to the eternal recurrence of difference. They are deployed to

[43] Backman Rogers, *American Independent Cinema*, 126.

disrupt the possibility of any fixed categories, and thus the concept of an authentic 'person' must be oxymoronic. It is not a case of 'entities' vs. 'persons'; rather, there are only entities.

As for Johnny, he is clearly seen operating behind a projected identity. He might not have the most engaging personality, but charisma does not equate to humanity. Backman Rogers' reification of Johnny—'a commodity'—echoes the misoneism that Simondon perceived in humans' distrust of machines. Simondon calls this 'a rejection of a strange or foreign reality. However, this strange or foreign being is still human, and a complete culture is one which enables us to discover the foreign or strange as human … something human is locked up, misunderstood, materialised, enslaved, and yet which nevertheless remains human'.[44] In other words, Simondon speaks of the mistrust of the uncanny or abject being that is both organic being and technical object: a social-cyborg. This can be literal (the amputee with prosthetic limbs) or figurative (machine operators, train drivers, call centre workers, the gamer). In *Somewhere*, Coppola shows how a subject that is so fully immersed in technical reality that they have become commodified, can be restored to a new version of humanity through a social and technical individuation with another person.

Simondon writes that 'what resides in the machines is human reality, human gesture fixed and crystallised into [a] working structure. These structures need support during the course of their operation, and the greatest perfection coincides with the greatest openness, with the greatest freedom of operation.'[45] Johnny himself is already an organic-technical hybrid, living as he does in a fully technical reality. He requires a suitable operator, in this case Cleo, in order to release the human reality and gesture that is 'crystallised in his working structure'. In this sense, Coppola's film first imagines the negative possibilities of technical reality as BwOs and stalled machines, and then shows how this situation can also be a ground zero for a new reality. A reality that flows from the abject zones of exception in temples of

[44] Simondon, *Technical Objects*, 16.
[45] Simondon, 18.

late capitalism such as Hollywood. *Somewhere* allows the potentials held within the zones of exception to overflow into new milieux, in a kind of abject expressionism. Johnny is eventually able to leave the abject zone of the hotel, although he does not move out of abjection. Through the *hōs me* he turns his werewolf condition into something productive. His breakthrough is to realise that his existence is by default liminal. But precisely because liminality is the default position of human existence, it cannot be regarded as a confinement. Rather, it is a productive force that opens up into myriad potentialities. In a sign of Johnny's move away from abjection and towards action-image cinema, the final shot of the film evokes the lone cowboy of classic Westerns. The established genre perhaps representing here the return to order. Johnny has embraced his bandit existence; still solitary, perhaps, but with renewed freedom of movement.

Knight of Cups

Terrence Malick rose to prominence during the 1970s with *Badlands* (1973) and *Days of Heaven* (1978). Following a two-decade hiatus spent in Paris, he returned to cinema with the WWII drama *The Thin Red Line* (1998). *The New World* (2005) marked the start of Malick's enduring partnership with cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki. In 2011 they made *The Tree of Life*, which premiered at that year's Cannes Film Festival where it won the Palme d'Or. Following the critical adulation of the *The Tree of Life*, Malick and Lubezki embarked on a series of narratively fragmented and formally experimental films: *To the Wonder* (2012), *Knight of Cups* and *Song to Song* (2017).[46]

[46] Aside from its triumph at Cannes, *The Tree of Life* was nominated for best picture, best director, and best cinematography at the Academy Awards. The film places 235th on the latest edition of *They Shoot Pictures Don't They?* top 1000 aggregated list and 102nd on *Sight and Sound's* 2012 critics poll. On the *BBC*'s 'top 100 films of the 2000s poll, the film was 7th.

These films have been critically divisive and have made little impression at the box-office. Even excluding *The Tree of Life*, Malick's previous films had met with universal critical adoration.[47] These films were marked by evocatively beautiful photography (hence all the awards for cinematography), and often featured scenes of nature shot at dusk—the 'golden hour'. Other notable Malick tropes include psychologically reflective voiceovers, outcast romantics, repeated use of the same musical cues, characters running their hands through fields of varying crops, and lovely shots of water. Malick's background in philosophy (an unfinished thesis on the concept of world in Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger; and a translation of Heidegger's *Vom Wesen des Grundes* [*The Essence of Reasons*, 1929] in 1969) has frequently attracted scholars to read his work through these frameworks.

The most recent 'trilogy' of experimental films, released with uncharacteristic frequency, have been as divisive at academic conferences as they have in the mainstream press. Writing in *The Guardian* following the release of *Song to Song*, Steve Rose illustrates that 'as Malick's output has increased, the reverence has decreased', and calls for the once near-mythical filmmaker to take another hiatus.[48] In the same publication, Danny Leigh suggests that Malick had not 'ever quite been forgiven' from coming in from the cold to tarnish his 1970s legacy.[49] The whispering voiceovers are still present (but now derided as self-parody), but some viewers appear unable to endure the now harsh digital film formats used by Lubezki, the sprawling and choppy score selections, the solemnly serious treatments

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[47] Also featured on the the *Sight and Sound* list are *Days of Heaven* (117), *The Thin Red Line* (183), and *Badlands* (202); on the TSPDT? poll: *Badlands* (127), *Days of Heaven* (140), *The Thin Red Line* (210), and *The New World* (776); *The New World* also appears on the *BBC* list at 39. Lubezki received another academy award nomination for his cinematography on *The New World*. *The Thin Red Line* received seven Oscar nominations (but no wins) including best picture and best cinematography, and best director and adapted screenplay for Malick. Malick won the Grand Prix prize for best director at Cannes for *Days of Heaven*, which was also nominated for three academy awards, winning for best cinematography (Néstor Almendros controversially took home the statuette amid claims that Haskell Wexler had shot over half of the film).
[48] Rose, '*Song to Song*: should Terrence Malick take a break?'.
[49] Leigh, 'Is Terrence Malick ahead of his time or out of date?'.

of arguably banal themes, and the contemporary settings (before *To the Wonder*, all of Malick's films had been period pieces, and all had received universal acclaim).[50] Both *Knight of Cups* and *Song to Song* received extremely limited UK cinema releases—playing at only a handful of screens—something that was previously unthinkable for a director whose new films were once seen as cinematic events. In the United States, *Knight of Cups* played in only sixty-eight theaters. In comparison, *The Tree of Life* played in 237 theaters, and *The Thin Red Line* in 1,657.

Of this 'trilogy of derision', *Knight of Cups* evokes the most negative responses.[51] The central character, Rick, is a wealthy, white, male, screenwriter suffering from stultifying ennui and possible solipsism—not the most immediately sympathetic character in our current social and cultural climate. There has been a curious unwillingness to engage with why Malick deploys such a character, and why he chose a Hollywood milieu for the film.[52] Even those involved in making the film have been reluctant, even angry, to discuss this. At the press conference following the film's premiere at the Berlin Film Festival, Christian Bale was asked by a journalist: 'There have been a lot of films made recently about the film industry and I would like to know what is reality there?' An exasperated Bale replies, 'What's your point of view about that? Your entire job is to think about films, ours is to make it [sic]. So you probably watch far more films than us, so what do you think about it?' Whilst Bale's reply seems unnecessarily flippant (although he has a point), consciously or not, he gestures towards a potential reading of the meta-Hollywood milieu, and the slew of contemporary

[50] It will be telling if Malick's next film, *A Hidden Life* (scheduled for release in 2019), which is set during WWII, receives a more positive response.
[51] Of all of Malick's feature films it has the lowest www.metacritic.com score (53) and the lowest www.imdb.com score (5.7). On the highbrow cinema streaming website www.mubi.com, it still has the lowest score for a Malick film (3.1).
[52] During Daniel Shaw's keynote speech on Heidegger and *The Thin Red Line* at the 2016 Film-Philosophy Conference at Edinburgh University an academic proclaimed that his overriding desire when watching *Knight of Cups* had been to 'punch Christian Bale in the fucking face.'

films depicting the industry.[53] Perhaps the reason for these films' inscrutability (or the lack of interest in engaging with them) is that they work, like Bale, by constantly throwing the question back to the asker. Investigations into the nature of meta-Hollywood cinema ultimately result in investigations of the self. The spectators of these films are asked to evaluate their own position and to speculate as to what their interest in such films says about themselves. If meta-Hollywood films can be, and often are, described as narcissistic vanity projects, then those who study them are similarly egocentric and fragile.

Martin P. Rossouw categorises critical approaches to Malick's work into two camps broadly corresponding to subjectivity and objectivity, 'one is led by a motive of Subjectivity, emphasizing how his style embodies and elicits reflective thinking … and the other by a motive of Nature, giving priority to the world to which his style gives presence'.[54] Gabriella Blasi picks up Rossouw's binary, flips it around, and applies it to Malick's 2010s filmography. She suggests that the confusing stylistic tropes of these recent films 'appear to tackle the complexities of a new relation between physics and poetics, with an editing style that favours notions of non-causality and entanglement between instances of non-linear, spacetime fragments and shots.'[55] The 'entanglement' of non-linearity no longer responds to a subject-object division. Rather, 'the stylistic features of *Knight of Cups* do not allow time to think and do not appeal to the audience's emotions either.'[56] In these terms, Blasi's entanglement emerges as negative cinematic individuation—which involves simultaneous thinking and feeling. However, Blasi moves towards a similar conclusion. Entanglements 'give us the opportunity to take Marina and Rick's crisis and awareness into the concrete,

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[53] Amongst recent titles previously mentioned in this thesis such as *The Artist*, *Birdman*, *Rules Don't Apply*, and *Hail! Caesar*, we might also think about *Maps to the Stars* (David Cronenberg, 2014) *Sandy Wexler* (Steven Brill, 2017), *The Disaster Artist* (James Franco, 2017), and *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (Quentin Taratino).
[54] Rossouw, 'There's Something About Malick', 294.
[55] Blasi, 'The Cinema of Entanglement', 22.
[56] Blasi, 24.

material realm of one's own life, acts, and choices.'[57] This transference from film to viewer is one desired effect of cinematic individuation. Both Blasi and myself reject Rossouw's subject-object division, she through negation and I through conflation. Our conclusions are nonetheless harmonious.

Knight of Cups is divided into eight parts, each named for a tarot card. As with *Somewhere*, it is worth describing the narrative structure of the film so that readers may garner a sense of the episodic nature of Rick's odyssey. Each chapter has its own defining characteristics, but all share an overarching unity of style and content. The film presents a form of the eternal return: both the same, yet different.

The octet of chapters is preceded by a prologue which begins with a narrator (Ben Kingsley) reading from John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) accompanied by Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (1910) on the score. Both this music and this narration occur periodically throughout the film. The narration continues over shots of Rick standing on a desert highway, shots of the Earth taken from outer space (provided by NASA), videotape footage of a family at a beach, and GoPro [an HD, miniature, and highly durable camera that is typically used to film extreme sports] footage in a garden. The narration changes to a reading of Thomas the Apostle's *The Hymn of the Pearl* (circa 3 AD) over a montage of Rick driving and partying with various women. Shots of Rick at a half empty club are interspersed with an abstract artist's film. Rick is shown being awoken by an earthquake. He drives to various film sets but finds himself on the outskirts of the shoot. He drives back to his empty modernist apartment and watches TV in the dark.

The first chapter (The Moon, not named) involves Rick's encounter with a young woman named Della (Imogen Poots). Together, they frolic in hotel rooms, drive Rick's convertible, and visit an aquarium. Rick is offered a lucrative film project by two studio

[57] Blasi, 32.

executives, though he is unresponsive. In a sequence of meetings, and in a mixture of voiceover and diegetic speech, Della propounds various theories about Rick's psychological state: 'I think you're weak'; 'you want a love experience'; 'am I bringing you back to life?'; 'we're not leading the lives that we were meant for. We're meant for something else'. Following a visit to a tarot card reader, Rick returns to the desert.

The second chapter (The Hanged Man, not named) concerns Rick and his brother Barry (Wes Bentley). Together they walk the street where Barry, a suicidal drug addict, was sleeping rough. Their conversation is one-sided as Rick is unresponsive. Barry talks angrily about their father Joseph's (Brian Dennehy) reaction to the suicide of their other brother Billy. Rick visits Joseph, who is evidently a wealthy businessman. Joseph asks Rick to 'redeem my life. Justify it'. A surreal sequence shows Joseph ranting about his life on a stage whilst a sparse audience whoops and applauds.

The third chapter (The Hermit, all chapters are now named with intertitles) follows Rick as he attends the garden party of a wealthy, obnoxious, and pontificating playboy called Tonio (Antonio Banderas). Rick weaves his way through the guests but is unable to make any connections beyond hollow platitudes. The narrator is heard reading from the *Hymn of the Pearl* once again.

In the fourth chapter (Judgement), Rick meets up with his ex-wife Nancy (Cate Blanchett). She expresses regret at their separation, demonstrates concern over his well-being, and admits to the pain he has caused her. Scenes set in the hospital where Nancy works show her caring for an elderly, possibly homeless, man with an infected leg. Nancy and Rick drive to the coast where he melancholically realises how much the relationship had meant to him.

Chapter five (The Tower) begins with Rick listening to the pathetic patter of two smartly suited men outside of a sleek office building: 'if you're not first in line you're

smelling somebody else's browneye'; 'living my life is like playing *Call of Duty* on easy'. In the same building, Rick meets Joseph and Barry. Joseph proselytises about making money and sacrificing his life for his children. Joseph's voiceover, however, admits to feeling lost and experiencing 'damnation'. During a driving scene, a sample of dialogue from David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* (1990 – 1991) is heard on the soundtrack. At a photoshoot, Rick meets a model named Helen (Frida Pinto) whom he refers to in his voiceover as 'a woman from another world'. She refers to herself as 'a stranger, a wanderer. Like you.' They spend time dancing, doing yoga, and at the beach. Rick hangs out with his brother Barry once more. The narrator reads *Qissat al-ghurba al-gharbiyya* [*The Tale of the Western Exile*, circa 1180]. Rick interrupts a burglary in progress at his apartment. The robbers complain that he does not have any possessions they can steal. In voiceover, Rick says 'I spent thirty years not living life but ruining it. I can't remember what kind of man I wanted to be.' The chapter ends with sped up POV footage of a car driving at night.

Chapter six (The High Priestess) opens with Karen (Teresa Palmer), a stripper, claiming that 'no one cares about reality any more'. She performs for Rick in a club, and they discuss identity and fantasy. The pair visit Las Vegas where a montage of famous casinos on the Strip is soundtracked by *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Vaughan Williams. Rick and Karen attend a circus performance, a firework display, and a rock concert.

Chapter seven (Death) opens with Rick and Elizabeth (Natalie Portman) being given a tour of a Japanese garden. They attend an art gallery and go sailing on the ocean. Elizabeth discovers that she is pregnant. The father is either her husband or Rick. A possible dream sequence shows Rick in a smoke-filled room with two young girls and a horse. Rick returns to the desert. Joseph is shown walking around an empty house, occasionally praying. A priest gives a sermon which continues as a sound bridge over scenes of Barry and Joseph arguing.

Chapter eight (Freedom) opens with the *Hymn of the Pearl* being read once more. Rick has a new companion, Isabel (Isabel Lucas). Nancy is shown treating a crippled man at the hospital. The film ends with a montage that shows Rick climbing a rock, surfacing from the sea and walking onto a beach, a sunset, and finally a POV shot of a car driving on an empty desert road.

Journeys and Faith

A journey motif occurs multiple times in *Knight of Cups* and is inherent in the spiritual texts that are quoted in the film: Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Suhrawardi's *The Tale of the Western Exile*, and Thomas' *The Hymn of the Pearl*. Taking place within a dream sequence, the titular pilgrim of Bunyan's novel, Christian, travels from his home in the City of Destruction to the Celestial City of God. Along the way, he passes through many bluntly allegorically named places such as 'Slough of Despond', 'Hill Difficulty', 'Valley of Humiliation', and 'Vanity Fair'. These locations are peopled by various symbolically named characters such as: 'Watchful', 'Apollonian', 'Lord-Good', and 'The Flatterer'.

With this information, it is enticing to interpret *Knight of Cups* as a loose adaptation of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. There is indeed a movement from 'destruction' towards some celestial place—note the light in the sky that appears frequently throughout the film [fig. 4.11]. Rick encounters characters who appear as two-dimensional constructs rather than developed beings. He travels to places that seem strangely empty and encounters vacant symbols waiting to be designated meaning. This reading is encouraged by the tarot card structure. Whether 'The Tower' card responds to Joseph's office skyscraper, or 'The High Priestess' card signifies Karen, is never made explicit, although the viewer is invited to draw the connections themselves. As with Bunyan's didactic proper nouns, tarot cards also have

certain meanings.[58] These, like astrological signs, can be organised to mean absolutely anything. Thus, such an allegorical reading operates under the guise of a fixed meaning, which is ultimately arbitrary.

Figure 4.11. The heavenly light that appears frequently throughout the film.

The Tale of the Western Exile is another allegorical text, albeit denser and less superficial than *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It tells of a traveller's journey and return to a world of base materialism in the West, represented by the city of Kairouan in Tunisia. Likewise, in *The Hymn of the Pearl*, the son of 'the king of kings' also travels to North Africa: to Egypt. There he is seduced by the Egyptians and, for a time, is diverted from his original task (to retrieve a pearl from a serpent). A letter from his father reminds the prince of his mission and his family, and allows him to complete his task, leave the land of temptation, and return home. Once again, these texts can be mapped onto the narrative structure of *Knight of Cups*. Rick could be posited in the exile, or the prodigal son, role, and LA is a good bet for a land of artificial pleasures and moral vacuity. Again, I would advise proceeding with caution. It is

[58] The cards in *Knight of Cups* are 'The Moon', said to represent imagination and animality; 'The Hanged Man' representing self-sacrifice; 'The Hermit', which can mean both to withdraw and the return to society; 'Judgement' is taken at face value; 'The Tower' represents danger or sudden change; 'The High Priestess' evokes dwelling in the presence of the divine; 'Death' represents the end of an interest or a relationship.

not that these texts hold no value, or are of no importance to Malick's film, but to conflate any of them as being a facsimile of the others is reductive. Instead they should be approached on their own merits and should be held in the mind as separate parts of a whole that they all enhance.[59]

The *Twin Peaks* monologue referenced in the film forms another piece of this puzzle. Rather than being read by the narrator, or by Joseph, it is a sample of dialogue used in a song on the score: Biosphere's ambient composition 'Hyperborea' (2001). It is from Major Garland Briggs' (Don S. Davis) retelling of a dream he experienced to his son, Bobby (Dana Ashbrook): 'A vision I had in my sleep last night. As distinguished from a dream, which is a mere sorting and cataloguing of the day's events by the subconscious. This was a vision. Fresh and clear as a mountain stream. The mind revealing itself to itself. In my vision, I was on the veranda of a vast estate, a palazzo of some fantastic proportion.' Although the sample finishes here, in the original dialogue Major Briggs proceeds to say how he encountered Bobby within the dream palazzo which causes 'a tremendous feeling of optimism and confidence'.

Whilst *Knight of Cups* may not adhere to any of these texts that it sits between *in summa*, they contain thematic resonances. Each has a version of the 'palazzo' (although with differing connotations); the notion of dreams and visions, or awakenings, is present in all; and the motif of a father-son relationship is an overt concern for most, less so in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. I posit that a unifying factor is the idea of returning, both in a literal sense, and in the Nietzschean sense. This collides with the charges of anaesthetised inhumanity that are levelled at *Knight of Cups* and its central character. A way of thinking through this—how Rick evolves from a languishing BwO—is through Kierkegaard's 'knight of faith'.

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[59] M. Gail Hamner falls into this trap in his chapter '"Remember Who You Are": Imagining Life's Purpose in *Knight of Cups*', in *Theology and the Films of Terrence Malick*, eds. Christopher B. Barnett and Clark J. Elliston (New York and Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2016), 251 – 274. Hamner does propose an interesting approach using C. S. Peirce's 'phaneroscopy': the film as aiming to represent all that is present to the mind.

Writing about the absurdist films of thwarted action and desire of Luis Buñuel, Deleuze proposes that:

> Entropy was replaced by the cycle or the eternal return. Now, the eternal return failed to be as catastrophic as entropy, just as the cycle failed to be as degrading in all its parts, but none the less [sic] they extract a spiritual power of repetition, which poses in a new way the question of a possible salvation. The food man, the saintly man, are imprisoned in the cycle, no less than the thug and the evildoer. But is not repetition capable of breaking out of its own cycle and of 'leaping' beyond good and evil? It is repetition which ruins and degrades us, but it is repetition which can save us and allow us to escape from the other repetition. Kierkegaard had already opposed a fettering, degrading repetition of the past to a repetition of faith, directed towards the future, which restored everything to us in a power which was not that of the Good but of the absurd. To the eternal return as reproduction of something always already-accomplished, is opposed the eternal return as resurrection, a new gift of the new, of the possible.[60]

So that this conception of the eternal return might break out of entropy, leap 'beyond good and evil' as Deleuze phrases it, it must transcend the 'types', such as 'food man' and 'saintly man'. For a film such as *Knight of Cups* which draws on texts like *The Pilgrim's Progress* or the Tarot system, this is a tricky proposition. Those references appear, superficially, to be entirely reliant on types. The utter proliferation of types, allegorical names, and metaphorical hints in *Knight of Cups* drives the frame of reference, but it is so excessive as to collapse under its own weight, and moves towards the absurd condition that Deleuze diagnoses as crucial for the eternal return.

Rick's movement from despairing stasis to renewed certainty—'faith'—through the absurd, follows the path described for Kierkegaard's knight of faith. Kierkegaard announces that 'infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith'.[61] This movement from resignation to faith is achieved through an unwavering belief in the absurd, even though the knight knows that their belief is

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[60] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 148. Gertrude Stein's 'rose is a rose is a rose is a rose' line from the poem *Sacred Emily* (1913) exemplifies repetition that invokes the absurd whilst evolving the meaning of 'rose' upon each iteration.
[61] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 56.

absurd (the crux of the knight of faith's 'faith'). Kierkegaard explains this in terms of an impossible romance:

> he infinitely renounces the claim to the love which is the content of his life; he is reconciled in pain; but then comes the marvel, he makes one more movement, more wonderful than anything else, for he says: 'I nevertheless believe that I shall get her, namely on the strength of the absurd, on the strength of the fact that for God all things are possible'.… The moment the knight resigned he was convinced of the impossibility, humanely speaking; that was a conclusion of the understanding.… In an infinite sense, however, it was possible, through renouncing it [as a finite possibility]; but then accepting that [possibility] is at the same time to have given it up, yet for the understanding there is no absurdity in possessing it, for it is only in the finite world that understanding rules and there it was and remains an impossibility … he admits the impossibility and at the same time believes the absurd.[62] [square brackets are present in the original text]

The task of the knight of faith might be conceived of as an absurd *hōs me*. You (as a knight of faith) accept the impossibility of your life/burden/desire, but through positioning yourself to face the infinite you embrace the absurd and endless possibilities that it unlocks. This beatific state is an embrace of Nietzschean life (as opposed to entropic death) that is encapsulated in the will to power. As Nietzsche's thoroughly absurd prophet Zarathustra thusly spoke: 'only where life is, there too is will: though not will to life; but—so I teach you—will to power!'[63] The will to power is the conduit for joy which, just as the knight of faith embraces the absurd infinite, is a desire for the inherently infinite and absurd eternal return: 'joy does not want heirs, nor children—joy wants itself, wants eternity, wants recurrence, wants all-eternally-self-same.'[64]

As a caveat to this, there is the scene where Rick and his brother Barry walk amongst a street of rough sleepers. All of these street people are black, and whilst Barry engages with them, Rick stands apart. As in David Lynch's *Inland Empire*, racial difference is only found

[62] Kierkegaard, 56 – 57.
[63] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 100.
[64] Nietzsche, 282.

on the margins (sleeping on the streets). In both films, race is under erasure. It is ignored yet exists in public—visibly invisible. Rick's failure to engage with these abject down-and-outs cements his own abjection. By shifting these uncomfortable social and racial divisions to his periphery, he makes himself a peripheral figure in his own milieu—visibly demonstrated in this scene. Rick's attitude (and Malick's film) are endemic of a society that is content to allow racial and economic segregation to perpetuate. Life as a dispossessed black person in the US becomes an experience of entropy. In order to keep the status quo, life as a wealthy white person also becomes a closed system. The bargain that is struck to retain white hegemony involves giving up potential: will to power/life. Rick can only break out of this state by giving into absurdity as a knight of faith.

Positing Rick as a knight of faith thus commits to a reading of *Knight of Cups* that traces a move from self-loathing to a newfound will to power, through an acceptance of the absurd nature of endless repetition. This is matched on a formalistic level through the recurrence of certain shots and musical cues. The repetitive nature of the visual motifs is offset by a constantly shifting mise-en-scène. It was crucial for Nietzsche that the will to power and the eternal return should not operate in a vacuum. They should be connecting forces of originality: 'all anew, all eternally, all chained together, entwined'.[65] To conceptualise the linkage between character and technique more adequately, I now return (as ever and forever) to Gilbert Simondon, in particular his tracing of a line connecting magical, technical, religious, and aesthetic, 'thinking'.

[65] Nietzsche, 283.

Magic, Religion, Technicity, and Aesthetics

For Simondon, magical thought (also referred to as the magical mode) is the predominant social and cultural principle prior to religion and technology. It does not infer a chaotic society, rather 'the magical mode of the relation with the world is not devoid of all organisation: on the contrary, it is rich in implicit organisation, attached to the world and to man; in the magical mode the mediation between man and the world is not yet concretised and constitutes as standing apart, by means of specialised objects or human beings.'[66] In this sense, the use of the tarot in *Knight of Cups* refers back to ancient practises of occultism (although tarot is merely a referent to, and not a true emblem of, the magical mode). Such practices involve strict ordering and coding systems that offer an (arbitrary) connection between a person and the world. But, as this connection is always mutable, it remains 'un-concretised'.

The magical phase detaches into two forms: 'the key-points' and the 'ground powers'. The latter are that which constitute the natural world—plants, animals, mountains, etc.—and the former are objects that structure this landscape: i.e. a bridge that spans a ravine. These two forms lead to two new phases of thought: technical and religious. Simondon outlines that 'the key-points objectivise themselves in the form of concretised tools and instruments, the ground powers subjectivise themselves by personifying themselves in the form of the divine and the sacred (God, heroes, priests).'[67] This anthropomorphic endeavour of religious thought can be seen in constellations (e.g. Perseus), mountains (Olympus), rivers (the Hindu goddess Ganga as personification of the Ganges), and, in *Knight of Cups*, through the figures of the tarot (High Priestess, The Hermit, etc.). This is made overtly obvious in the allegorical texts quoted by Malick, wherein everything comes to symbolise god, Satan, virtues, and sin.

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[66] Simondon, *Technical Objects*, 169.
[67] Simondon, 181.

Simondon cautions that 'technicity and religiosity are not degraded forms or relics of magic; they come from the splitting in two of the primitive magical complex, the original reticulation of the human milieu, into figure and ground.'[68] The rupture of the magical mode is comparable to Lacan's mirror stage in that it represents the delineation of a subject and object division. Earlier, I showed how, in Coppola's *Somewhere*, these definitions can be reconfigured within abject zones of indistinction, where the established boundaries break down. Simondon proposes that the way in which these modes mediate between a person and the world 'becomes itself a world, the structure of the world.'[69] This is very much a case of the 'mediation is the message'.[70]

What *Knight of Cups* endeavours to achieve is a bringing together of religious and technical thinking—subjectivity and objectivity—and thus combines them in such a way as to render them indistinct: abject. This adheres to a fourth progression of reality that Simondon calls 'aesthetic reality, which is a new mediation between man and the world, an intermediate world between man and the world. Aesthetic reality in fact cannot be said to be either properly object or properly subject'.[71] These ever increasing 'intermediate worlds' serve as zones of exception wherein reality loses its subject and object definitions. Simondon declares that this does not represent a new rupture but rather, 'it comes as a surplus of already given reality, bringing it constructed structures, but constructed on foundations that are a part of the real and which become integrated into the world. The aesthetic work thus makes the universe bud, extending it by establishing a network of works, in other words by establishing radiating realities of exception'.[72] *Knight of Cups* connects a series of works (texts, symbols, music, photography, encounters, locations), and integrates them into a world that is constructed

[68] Simondon, 186.
[69] Simondon, 193.
[70] Apologies to Marshall McLuhan.
[71] Simondon, *Technical Objects*, 194. Simondon provides the overview that 'technical thought operates, religious thought judges, aesthetic thought operates and judges at the same time', 201.
[72] Simondon, 195 – 196.

around the eternal return to excess and surplus. A scene on a film-shoot takes place behind the walls of the set rather than in front of them; Lubezki continually shoots the same holy light in the sky, repeating the shot many times after its symbolic value has been established until it is exhausted; the endless party scenes: a literal excess that serves no narrative purpose, their only function now being an aesthetic one.

When applying cinematic individuation to *Knight of Cups*, the film is granted the status of aesthetic object. Simondon writes that 'like the tool, the aesthetic object is an intermediary between objective structures and the subjective world; it is the mediator between knowledge and will.'[73] Like Nietzsche's Dionysian-Apollonian dichotomy (see Chapter 2), the space of mediation opened by the aesthetic object (the film) stimulates both the intellectual faculties (knowledge) and bodily impulses and affects (will). Simondon aligns aesthetic thought with magical thought as both modes impose a structure onto the world that is infinitely ephemeral and open to change.[74] Thus, both are invoking a form of the powers of the false through a rejection of fixed structures and identities. And, both are abject in that they collapse the subject-object dyad, but as they aim to produce new structures they are therefore forms of abject expressionism.

The aesthetic thinking/mode of *Knight of Cups* is exemplified by the opening sequence, which demonstrates the virtuosic filming strategies of Malick and Lubezki, and also in the later strip club scene which shows more fully how Malick deploys music to enforce his vision.

The Opening Bars

[73] Simondon, 204.
[74] Simondon, 207.

This sequence begins with the title card, the reading of the beginning of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia of a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. The black screen cuts to a wide shot of an expanse of desert where Rick is walking in an extreme long shot. The camera cuts to a low angle medium shot of Rick. The sun is rising in the distance and its refracted rays are visible [fig. 4.12]. Successive jump cuts—all hand-held medium shots of Rick—lead to a road, where Rick stops and looks around. Abruptly, the camera cuts to NASA supplied footage of the partial and overcast Earth shown from outer space. A satellite can be seen at the top of the frame, and the aurora borealis cuts a line across the middle of the shot [fig. 4.13]. The Earth is spinning rapidly, lending the effect of camera movement where there is none. A jump cut shows the satellite still in shot, but the Northern Lights have vanished, and the cloud cover has dissipated. The light hubs of populated areas are now visible. Another jump cut shows the aurora borealis but from an angle closer to Earth. Rick's voiceover segues into a sound bridge to a POV shot of a car driving through a tunnel towards the bright light of the exit [fig. 4.14]. As the light fills the screen, the scene changes again to a blotchy videotape recording of a young child standing in the surf at a beach. The camera cuts to a full shot of Rick carrying the child out of the sea [fig. 4.15], and then to a worm's eye view of seagulls circling in the sky. It is sunset, and again the sun is a notable presence in the shot. Due to the low quality of the camera, it appears as a smear of white and yellow colour. The camera cuts to a medium angle long shot of a rowing boat floating in the foreground in front of the sunset and the reflection of the light on the ocean.

Figure 4.12. The viewer is introduced to Rick and the recurring light motif in a desert.

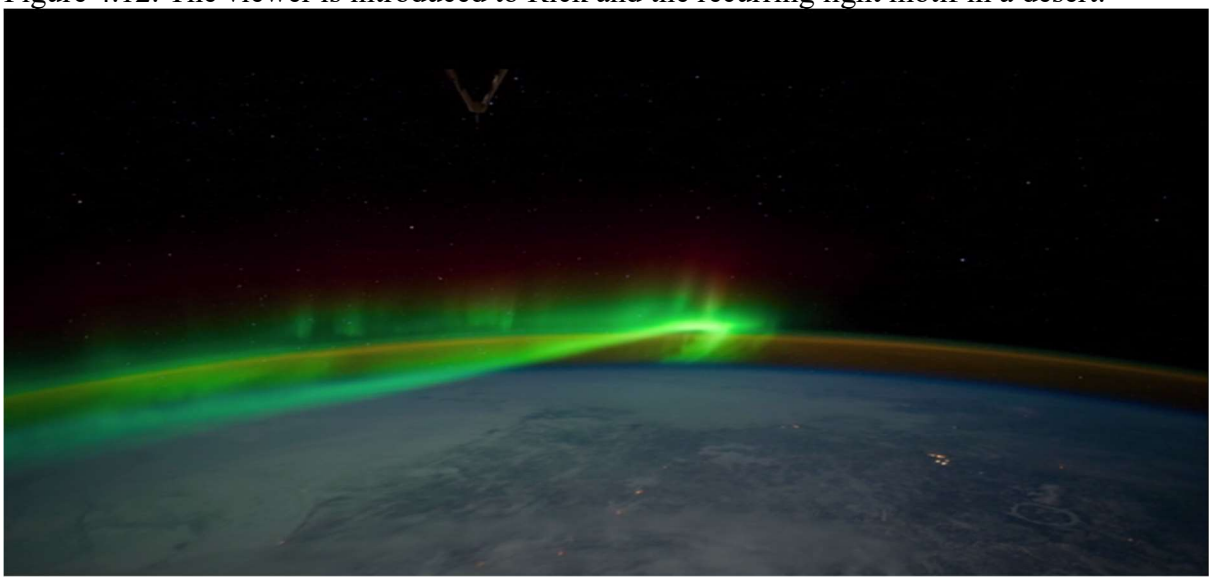

Figure 4.13. NASA footage of the Earth shows the aurora borealis.

Figure 4.14. The light appears once more, at the end of the tunnel…

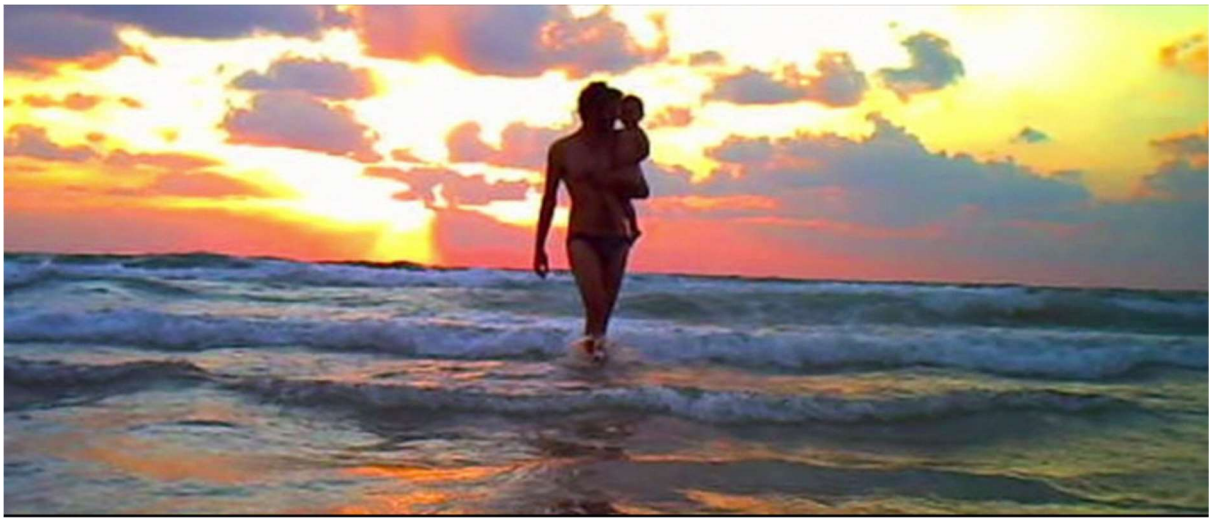

Figure 4.15. Grainy videotape footage struggles to capture the colours of the sunset but creates an impressionistic picture.

Another change of scene equals another change of camera. A GoPro is used to track a kite in the sky before quickly cutting to a close-up of a girl on a swing—shot using a fish-eye lens [fig. 4.16]. More extreme close-up shots of children playing are accompanied by a change on the soundtrack. Now the beginning of the *Hymn of the Pearl* is heard in tandem with Wojciech Kilar's *Exodus* (1981). The scene changes to a handheld shot from inside a car that Rick is driving. Two young women in the passenger seats are laughing and waving at passers-by. This driving scene continues in a succession of jump cuts. A rapid montage cuts from GoPro footage from inside a wave, to a series of shots at a rooftop pool party. Rick and his brother Barry laugh, drink, and mingle with young women. A full shot of Rick collapsing onto a chair is turned on its axis roughly one hundred degrees. The scene changes to an interior, which is peopled by the same revellers. The GoPro camera with the fish-eye lens swings into laughing faces in close-ups, and shows confetti falling from the ceiling. This scene changes to a long shot of LA and the camera pans left to reveal Rick in a close-up looking mournfully over a balcony. Following some shots of collapsed partygoers and general squalor, a medium shot of Rick shows him walking slowly in front of a large quartered window that frames the cityscape [fig. 4.17].

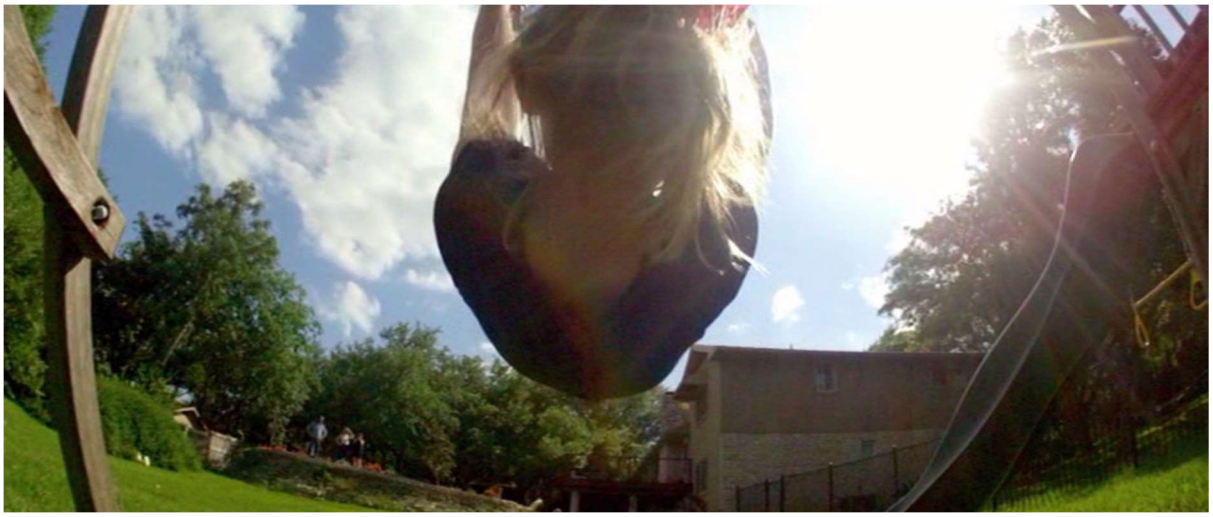

Figure 4.16. This contrasts with the high-definition GoPro footage that follows it.

Figure 4.17. Rick stares into space dissected by multiple frames.

The scene changes to night, and an extreme low-angle close-up frames Rick against a ceiling of neon lights. The camera cuts to a wide angle long shot of the room, now rearranged with a dancefloor and a screen showing an abstract film [fig. 4.18]. This film then fills the screen, seemingly non-diegetic to the scene [fig. 4.19]. It is a stop-motion, black-and-white, close-up of a naked woman who smears black liquid over her face and body and covers herself with cut-out pictures of her own face.[75] By the end of the film she is completely black. The scene changes back to the desert (now deserted) sunrise and the sequence ends.

[75] The film is Quentin Jones' *Paint Test No. 1* (2012).

Figure 4.18. The colours, windows, and screens lend this scene a Pop Art, or neo-noir sheen.

Figure 4.19. The artist's film shows a woman using paint and cut out photographs to create a series of costumes and masks.

On first watch, seeing these opening scenes flash past is an overwhelming experience. Even after subsequent viewings the changes in location, camera, lens, music, and narration are so numerous, and happen so quickly, that it remains difficult to process the audio-visual onslaught. The camera format changes from 35mm [fig. 4.12] to the 1120mm camera used by NASA to film outer space [fig. 4.13], to digital [fig. 4.14], to videotape [fig. 4.15] to GoPro [fig. 4.16], to digital, back to GoPro, to high-resolution digital [fig. 4.17], and to the final stop-motion sequence [fig. 4.19]. Each format corresponds to a type of aesthetic mode, in that they each act as a mediator between the viewer and the world viewed. This

shows how the world perceived by the spectator is not the world-in-itself, but instead is the world that exists within the mediated space. Unlike Plato's Ideals, Kant's *Ding an sich* [thing-in-itself], or Schopenhauer's world of Representation, there is no hierarchy of 'truth value' in Simondon's theories. All worlds are equally valid. The world in this mediated space is a projected world that can only be experienced through the technical object of the camera. But, due to the different capacities of Lubezki's cameras, this projected and mediated in-between zone is always open to change. The camera imposes a structure on to the world, but it is an ephemeral structure that can easily be altered.

This is embodied not only by the contrasting sharpness of the image, but by the way light is captured. This imbues the frames of each differently captured scene with a unique pictorial sense. The 35mm format evokes the naturalism of landscape artists; the high-gauge NASA camera looks hyperreal; the videotape is blotchy and impressionistic; the GoPro is photorealistic; and the HR digital camera gives a high contrast between colours that corresponds to Pop Art or neo-noir chiaroscuro lighting.

The composition of the HR digital scenes adds a series of geometrical frames-within-frames to this already simmering cauldron of stylistic tricks. The unaligned window frames, safety railing, and string of fairy lights in figure 4.17 create fifteen rectangular sections (if not more) within the frame of the shot. The effect, with the subtle changes in shade, is like a monochromatic Piet Mondrian painting, or an interior shot from a Yasujirō Ozu film. From the wide shot in figure 18 (itself containing several sub-frames), the viewer can perceive that the *Paint Test No. 1* film is displayed on a large screen composited of nine smaller screens. Yet, when the film fills the screen it is clearly played on an unbroken display (probably the original video inserted directly into *Knight of Cups* in the editing suite). Again, this leap from diegetic to non-diegetic material troubles the nature of the world that is mediated by the aesthetic object. I reiterate: the world that the viewer sees is in fact a

simulacrum that is entirely contained within the mediated field, the actual world is never obtained, as an unmediated experience of the world is inconceivable and unnecessary.[76]

The frequent deployment of sound bridges and jump cuts mean that the disparate parts of the montage flow into each other but are also fragmentary. Lubezki's camera is always in motion, not only here but throughout the entire film, meaning that the viewer is never afforded the time nor the space to reflect upon the shifting aesthetic realities that they are moving through. The only constant visual that the audience is able to latch their attention onto is the celestial light seen in figures 4.12, 4.14, 4.15, and 4.16. The satellite in figure 4.13 is analogous to the sun, as it is itself a celestial body, and is potentially watching over us (or harvesting our GPS data). My conception of this light as god or an omnipotent being (and I would not be first to conflate light with god or heaven) is an example of the religious mode. I have anthropomorphised an astral body into a personification of whatever it is I understand 'god' to mean, or whatever I suspect god to mean to Malick. The chameleon-like mise-en-scène undermines this position. So thoroughly demystified is the possibility of an immutable 'true' experience of the world, that the idea that this light can stand for some transcendental ideal is made risible. Yet, there it is throughout the film; a winking, increasingly absurd reminder that only Rick's knight of faith can continue to be quixotically guided by. Perhaps it would be better, like Georges Bataille, to conceive of the sun as an anus that reveals the world to be 'purely parodic'.[77]

[76] Here I refer to the discussion of Romantic-era philosophers encountered in Chapter 2. More specifically, Arthur Schopenhauer's description of true reality residing beyond our experience that is guided by will (desire), and Friedrich Nietzsche's insistence that transcendental 'truth' and 'reality' are not useful ideas (they are unfalsifiable) and are not productive ends to seek (they result in fixed categories).
[77] Bataille, *L'Anus solaire* [*The Solar Anus*, 1931], 9.

The Strip Club

Over an extreme long shot showing a brightly lit multi-story carpark, Karen's voiceover asks 'What mood am I in?', and declares that 'no-one cares about reality anymore.' The screen cuts to the title card for this section of the film, 'The High Priestess', and Burial's 'Ashtray Wasp' (2012) begins to play on the score. A sound-bridge leads into a strip club interior. A tracking shot slowly moves forward, panning right and tilting up to show a dancer on a small stage, then tilting down to show Rick: seated at the foot of this platform. The camera cuts to a shot that dollies in to a glass cabinet containing lingerie. The camera cuts to a wide angle shot of the club. Rick is standing in front of a strong white spotlight, causing the light to refract around him [fig. 4.20]. A conversation between Karen and Rick is heard on the soundtrack over a montage of shots of dancers and customers. Eventually the camera cuts to a medium two-shot of Karen dancing for Rick—bringing sound and image in-sync. The rays of the spotlight are again prominent in frame right [fig. 4.21]. The camera cuts to a reverse angle to show Karen dancing for Rick on what is presumably a different platform. The Burial song can no longer be heard. As Karen leans down and forward to bring her face-to-face with Rick, the camera dollies around to show the light shining directly between them [fig. 4.22]. A montage of shots in the club leads to a long shot of a woman dancing directly in front of the light [fig. 4.23]. At this moment, 'Ashtray Wasp' fades back in and the scene ends.

Figure 4.20. Rick is caught in the heavenly light as he peruses the strip club.

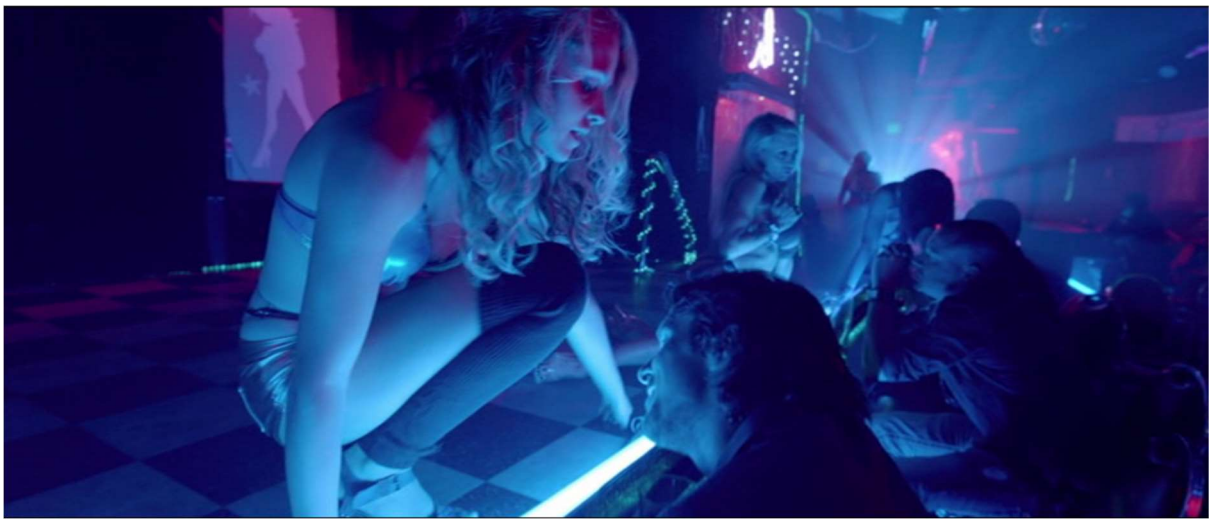

Figure 4.21. The light bears witness to Rick's first meeting with Karen.

Figure 4.22. A two-shot? Or a three-shot given the prevalence of that light?

Figure 4.23. A renewed focus in the light revives Burial's music on the score.

If there were any doubt as to the absurd qualities of the celestial light that guides Rick, then its appearance as a spotlight in a Las Vegas strip club should remove it. In *Somewhere*, profoundly dull pole-dancing sequences were stretched out to such durations as to become humorous. The fixed smiles of the dancers, their poorly coordinated routines, the irritating sound design that captured every friction 'squeak' of skin on metal, the off-centre framing, and the evident boredom of the audience (of one), posited the performance as an absurd and sad act. In *Knight of Cups*, the scene may have a glossier sheen (expressionistic pink and blue hues, gliding camerawork) but the presence of absurd divinity in over half the shots [see figs. 4.20 – 4.23] undermines such slickness. In figure 4.22 Karen, who until now has stood several feet above Rick on the dance platform, brings herself down to his eyeline. As they come face-to-face in a tight two-shot, the light shines directly between them. It now occupies the in-between space of aesthetic reality. The relationship between the two characters is mediated by absurd divinity. For Rick, the knight of faith, this cements his certainty in the absurd and the path of religious thought; for the viewer, it cements their (un)certainty in divine absurdity: this mediated view of mediation is a perfect simulacrum.

Karen's question ('What mood am I in?') and her proposition ('no one cares about reality anymore') are leading statements for the experience of this scene—mood and reality

both being variable. This line of thinking is backed-up by the choice of 'Ashtray Wasp' to score the scene—presumably not the most frequently heard song at strip clubs. 'Ashtray Wasp' is a long composition with several movements contained within and, like much of Burial's music, consists of looping (but manually programmed) keyboard and drum lines that range from extremely bass-heavy to tinny and bass-less. Much incidental noise such as radio static and the sound of rain is overlaid; liberal use of samples from pre-existing music (in this case Hiroshi Watanabe, the Stone Roses, Monica, and C418) and other clips completes a complex and at times arrhythmic soundscape. This mirrors the formal collage of Lubezki's camerawork and the morphing mood and reality signalled at the beginning of the scene.

Documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis has described Burial as a practitioner of a new form of high romanticism. Curtis diagnoses our current milieu as a world which is obsessed and driven by economics, statistics, results, and bureaucracy (technical thought). Artists such as Burial represent a reaction against this, and a widely-held urge to burst out into feeling and affect—to 'bring magic back to the world'.[78] This traces the same line as magical thought which, following a split into the certainties of technical and religious thought, evolved into aesthetic thought. Like magical thought, aesthetic thinking imposes a non-rigid structure onto the world using the dismantled categories of the technical and religious modes. Burial uses deconstructed and discarded fragments of old forms to forge something original—yet self-destroying—that mediates a new relation to the world of mood (romanticism).

This neo-romanticism can be compared to Leonard Bernstein's neo-classicism [see Chapter 2] which sees composers such as Igor Stravinsky 'quoting' classical music in order to mutate older musical forms into something new. This is a form of modernism, like T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* (1922), wherein the fragments of art and culture become building blocks for a future mode of expression. It is both the knight of faith who embraces absurdity,

[78] Curtis was speaking on episode 44 of *The Adam Buxton Podcast*.

and Bataille's *The Solar Anus*, 'that is to say each thing that one looks at is a parody of another, or moreover the same thing under a deceptive form…. Lead is a parody of gold. Air is a parody of water. The brain is a parody of the equator. Coitus is a parody of crime.'[79] Bataille's sense of parody is refreshing. He does not propose that things are lesser or ridiculous versions of what they purport to be; but rather, they have the potential to be different. In the neo-romantic mode everything is mutable. It is the opposite of the empirical milieu of statistics and rigid bureaucracy: a new milieu of possibility and suggestion.

Some Conclusions on the Possibilities of Art

What Simondon called art 'is what established the transductivity [transference] of the different modes in relation to each other; art is what remains non-modal in a mode, just as around an individual there remains a pre-individual reality associated with it and enabling it to communicate in the institution of the collective.'[80] Within the realms of aesthetic thinking, the aesthetic object creates an assemblage between all the previous modes (magical, technical, religious) in which linkages can be forged, broken, and re-forged. With the concepts of the transindividual and ensembles of social individuation, Simondon shows how the dormant preindividual shares left over from the process of individuation can be passed on, and even combined to create something new. Art, such as *Somewhere*, *Knight of Cups*, and 'Ashtray Wasp' has the ability to create collective situations where technical objects can also pass on and combine that which previously remained non-modal (pre-individual).

An encounter with art—'aesthetic thinking'—collapses fixed structures of reality: 'it does not make eternal, but grants the power of rebirth and the capacity to fulfil oneself … the power to have been itself but also to be itself one more time and a multitude of other times …

[79] Bataille, *The Solar Anus*, 9.
[80] Simondon, *Technical Objects*, 209.

giving identity the power to repeat itself without ceasing to be identity.'[81] This is Nietzsche's eternal return liberated. For if the eternal return is indeed eternal then it is deathly: condemned to infinity. But, when identity is defined by constant self-destruction and rebirth, then it defeats infinity. Identity should be treated like The Ship of Theseus: you can remain yourself even after replacing all constituent parts. An artwork is a simulacrum that is constantly destroying the ideal forms of beings and objects, 'liberating itself with respect to being and non-being: a being can become and repeat itself without negating itself', 'in this way it is magical.'[82] The magical mode of thinking orders the world into a structure, but allows for innumerable other structures to replace it. The aesthetic mode of thinking allows for innumerable structures to coexist simultaneously. Simondon reveals that the result of this is that 'every reality, singular in space and in time, is nevertheless a networked reality'.[83]

Simondon does concede a degree of rigidity. He warns that 'one cannot change the network, one doesn't construct a network of one's own: one can only connect to a network, adapt to it, participate in it'.[84] Simondon channels E. M. Forster's 'only connect' primarily as a guard against solipsism.[85] The dark side of the eternal return and its proliferations of realities and selves is the conception that one can create closed networks with oneself (or selves). *Somewhere* shows that this leads only to the crippling and fraught Body without Organs. Without connecting to a pre-existing network (which are already countless in number) there can be no exchange, or unification, of pre-individual and non-modal shares. The ultimate aim of the aesthetic mode is to heighten awareness that, in fact, we are already networked in a web of interdependent relations. Nothing I do affects merely myself, there is always a force exerted on the other beings in my network. It is when one believes that one is

[81] Simondon, 211.
[82] Simondon, 211.
[83] Simondon, 211.
[84] Simondon, 229.
[85] The famous motif of Forster's *Howard's End* (1910).

a solitary being that one loses perspective on the constant butterfly effect of existence. The closed network of one unit is a powerful mirage where, despite being part of a multitude of interconnected assemblages, the subject is nonetheless blind to this situation.

The release of the non-modal is crucial to human evolution and for the socio-political sphere. Simondon outlines this importance:

> the introduction of technicity to ensembles which situate man as organiser or as element makes technics evolve; to the same extent and at the same time, the evolving aspect of human groups becomes conscious and this consciousness creates socio-political thought.… the technical thought of ensembles and social and political thought are coupled through their conditions of origin and their points of integration into the world. Thus it is within the perspective of permanent change within technical and socio-political structures that technical thought and socio-political thought can coincide.[86]

Both *Somewhere* and *Knight of Cups* seek to establish abject zones of exception where the Body without Organs that is Johnny and the knight of resignation that is Rick can experience the collapse of the structures of world and being. In these in-between spaces, the dualisms of religious and technical thoughts, and human and machine, are shown to be hollow constructs. In this abject yet liberated state, they are then free to interact with the multitude of socio-technical networks that they are suddenly aware exist. Thus, they are both able to experience a sense of rebirth without any obvious change in situation: it is a form of the *hōs me*.

Through the formal strategies of the filmmakers—particularly those utilised in *Knight of Cups*—these films also act as aesthetic objects for the viewer in the process of cinematic individuation. They create absurd spaces of mediation between the viewer and the screened world. Like Johnny and Rick, the viewer finds themselves cast into a milieu of abject expressionism. This is mildly traumatic (the structures of the world and of identity disintegrate), but can lead to a newfound connection and belief in the world. Not the world as

[86] Simondon, *Technical Objects*, 237.

a true world, but a world that is both as ‘true’ and as ‘false’ as any other, and that for a brief moment supports a neo-romantic explosion of affect.

Conclusion

From the commiseration shared by liberating heroes and the oppressed among themselves—for they have unlimited commiseration of their equals—the whole ethos of liberation is organized. – Enrique Dussel[1]

Cinematically Individuated

Throughout the preceding chapters I have delineated the operation, and the potential applications, of a new way of considering our encounters with film, what I have referred to as cinematic individuation. This process lies in the gap between complete immersion (and emotional attunement) and alienation (intellectual observation). Cinematic individuation holds us in an in-between space where both states are experienced in a kind of sympathetic awareness. Whilst not mutually exclusive of industrial circumstance and history, cinematic individuation traces our corporeal and cerebral relationship with cinema. On one level it describes what happens during certain viewing experiences; on another, it is a tool to be deployed and one which the viewer can train themselves to use. Ask yourself, has reading this thesis changed the way you react and think during your viewing experiences?

Cinematic individuation is also a means to collapse the distance between film and viewer. This distance has been supported (not necessarily purposefully) by cognitive film theory which has relied upon a subject and object division. Whilst subjectivity has constantly been thrown into crisis since the Second World War, the notion that something resembling a subject exists and needs to be safeguarded has been hard to discard. Gilbert Simondon's investigations into individuation and ontogenesis depart from a dialectic of humans and technology and of subject and object. Instead, seemingly oppositional forces and creations

[1] Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 65.

individuate together in interdependent networks. The loss, or phasing, of subject positions is here not an inherent cause of anxiety but is simply a part of metastable being—that which is constantly shifting through various relations and states.

The chapters and case studies of this thesis explored how cinematic individuation can apply to self-reflexive cinema (and in turn how self-reflexivity can be used to map out the inner workings of cinematic individuation). This is a mode of filmmaking which treads a thin line between emotion and intellect, and often attempts to collapse the sense of identity and reality both narratively and formally. Chapter 1 showed how with highly metafictional cinema the margins for error are much finer. Whilst metafiction such as *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (Wes Craven) and *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze) can bring about the fall of categories, this often remains an intellectual game with little scope to generate emotional affect. Chapter 2 sought to address this by turning to Bernard Rose's Hollywood-romanticism in *Ivansxtc*. The contention with romantic-era philosophy was in turn used to tease out the emotional elements of what is stylistically a very harsh film. Chapter 3 demonstrated that David Lynch's surreal self-reflexive films *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire* could be both alienating and upsetting, whilst also capable of overwhelming this alienation with sensory assaults. I posited that the collapsing structures of reality and subjectivity in these films were ultimately celebrations of networked identity. Chapter 4 was the most thorough examination of a malaise which hangs over recent Hollywood filmmaking. Here I proposed ways in which we could think about these films as not just symptomatic of societal dread, but as abject experiences which, whilst difficult to endure, contained within them something positive.

In many ways, this has been a study of Hollywood as an industry which produces abjection. I have, however, consistently theorised that abjection is not always a state of negation. It is in fact tethered to the departure from the subject-object dyad that cinematic individuation requires. In the next section of this conclusion I will explain how this maps on

to an ongoing filmmaking phase in Hollywood and will further explicate how my case studies reflect and respond to this.

Cinema III: The Abjection-Image

Gilles Deleuze describes how, before the Second World War, cinema predominantly adhered to what he describes as movement-images. Movement-image films are defined by the agency of their characters who are imbued with the capacity to change and dictate situations through their actions. These films tend to follow an SAS' [situation-action-situation] or an ASA' [action-situation-action] structure whereby there is always a progressive movement towards change. The situation is put in flux by the actions of a character, and a new situation is brought about by the actions of another/the same character. Whilst Deleuze defines further categories of images within movement-images—perception-images, action-images, affection-images, and potentially others—the sub-category of image is always prominent and legible to the viewer.[2] Post-war (speaking generally) cinema ushers in time-image cinema due to a crisis of the movement-image brought about by the war, amongst other factors. Deleuze writes:

> Nevertheless, the crisis which has shaken the action-image has depended on many factors which only had their full effect after the war, some of which were social, economic, political, moral and others more internal to art, to literature and to the cinema in particular. We might mention, in no particular order, the war and its consequences, the unsteadiness of the 'American Dream' in all its aspects, the new consciousness of minorities, the rise and inflation of images both in the external world and in people's minds, the influence on the cinema of the new modes of narrative with which literature had experimented, the crisis of Hollywood and its old genres…. Certainly, people continue to make SAS' and ASA' films: the greatest commercial successes always take that route, but the soul of the cinema no longer does. The soul of the cinema demands increasing thought, even if thought begins by undoing the system of actions, perceptions and affections on which the global situation can give rise to an action which is capable of modifying it—no more

[2] Deleuze, *Cinema I*, 78.

> than we believe that an action can force a situation to disclose itself, even partially.[3]

Deleuze discerns time-image films as being prevalent in various post-war cinematic new wave movements beginning with Italian Neo-Realism and spreading to *La Nouvelle Vague* and, later, *Neuer Deutscher Film*. He also frequently references Japanese major studio productions from Kenji Mizoguchi, Yasujirō Ozu, and Akira Kurosawa.[4] The correlative movement in Hollywood arises with the New Hollywood period from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. The 'unsteadiness of the American Dream' which Deleuze puts forward has its most thorough excavation through these films by the likes of Robert Altman, Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, and so on. And, following Deleuze's caveat, Hollywood did not abandon SAS' and ASA' structured films. In fact, the blockbuster franchises that reinstalled producer and agent power during the 1980s, the high-concept star vehicles, lavish historical epics, and mid-budget Oscar bait arising from the American indie scene (see Chapter 1), arguably restored movement-image cinema as the predominant mode of filmmaking in Hollywood.

What the films studied in this thesis demonstrate is that there is a strand of Hollywood's recent output which puts the movement-image into crisis once more. These detached characters and listing milieux are not a rerun of the New Hollywood. They lack the awareness of those cinematic antecedents, there is no countercultural alternative to drop out into, there is no attempt to rage against the system. So, whilst this might broadly be described as time-image cinema, it would be more precise to categorise it as abjection-image cinema. This is abjection in the form of Julia Kristeva's self-abjection—a psychological state rather than disgust provoked by rejected or tainted material. The abjection-image does not

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[3] Deleuze, 229.

[4] The closer correlation between these modernist movements and Japan would appear to be the Japanese New Wave, but given that the *Cinema* books are based upon Deleuze's own cinematic viewing history, it is quite possible he simply had not had exposure to these films.

successfully contain its abject content. Rather, it abjectly overspills its boundaries, transferring an abject affect to the viewer. But as I have frequently proposed, the state of self-abjection can be turned into a potentiality. The indistinct state collapses our sense of subjectivity but if we can endure this discomfort we have the opportunity to emerge with an altered, more productive sense of ourselves and our place in the world.

In the introduction of this thesis I ruminated upon various aesthetic strategies which might invoke cinematic individuation. This non-exhaustive list included (1) pleasurable musical or visual frisson; (2) disruptive audio-visual stimuli; (3) trance-like soundtrack designs, editing rhythms, or shot durations; and (4) melancholia and/or nostalgia embedded in the *fabula* of the film. All seven case studies demonstrated at least two of these categories. *New Nightmare* was predicated upon nostalgia [4] and featured some 'gentle' disruption [2]; *Adaptation* found an escape from melancholia [4] through its sophisticated play of contrasting rhythms [3]; purely in its opening and closing montages, Rose's *Ivansxtc* invoked frisson [1], displayed abrasive visuals [2], and used a prime example of melancholic art in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* [4]; both of the Lynch films spun around a dichotomy of musical pleasure [1] and sensory disruption [2], as well as exploiting the tension between nostalgia and melancholy [4]; Coppola's *Somewhere* played with musical rhythm and duration [3] in its depiction of depression [4]; and *Knight of Cups* satisfied all four categories through its dense tapestry of audio-visual techniques which were by turns pleasurable [1], ugly [2], overwhelming [3], and in support of yet another 'stuck' protagonist [4].

Commencing in Chapter 2, I began to think through these aesthetic choices using romantic period philosophers, notably Friedrich Nietzsche. Under the auspices of 'neo-romanticism', I established a philosophical framework that began with Nietzsche's rejection of absolutism, moved through Deleuze's application of Nietzschean 'powers of the false' for positive destabilisation, and culminated in Chapter 4 with Simondon's (this was not

always a temporally linear journey) 'aesthetic mode', wherein an encounter with art creates a mediated space where we can see the interdependent connections between things, and where fixed categories and boundaries collapse.

Abject-image cinema proves very resistant to purely rational interpretations. Or, such interpretations do not feel particularly useful. One aim of neo-romanticism, and ultimately cinematic individuation, too, is to encourage more emotive, and less judgemental, readings and responses to such films.

Stop Making Sense

To what extent do my selection of meta-Hollywood films correspond to these ideas of abjection-image cinema and neo-romanticism? As I have mentioned in previous chapters, Malick's *Knight of Cups* and Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* and, particularly, *Inland Empire*, are intrinsically bound up in this kind of cinematic practice. Perhaps some useful questions to ask are: how would these films play had they been made ten years earlier? How do they play differently today than when they were made? I suggested in Chapter 3 that *Inland Empire* demonstrates the anxiety of a disenfranchised identity in the US that would later come to the forefront of politics and discourse. *Inland Empire* was a difficult sell in 2006. Although there was growing resentment and unease caused by the Bush regime and the 'War on Terror', the financial crash was yet to come. The wounds on display at that time were soon to be covered by an Obama shaped sticky plaster for eight years. Hypothetically, showing *Inland Empire* in 1996 would have probably provoked revulsion. Why is this film so ugly? Why is it so confusing? The film only begins to align with its audience's cultural and emotional wavelengths following the eruption of nationalism in the mid-2010s.

Likewise, *Knight of Cups*' release in 2015 came a year too soon, and critic and audience reception were fairly tepid. Of what is this impressionistic style in service? Why do we need a film about a navel-gazing white man? Post-2016 viewings of the film highlight the fact that we do need to come to terms with white identity. The alt-right and new nationalism does not simply come from the downtrodden precariat in US states like West Virginia and depressed UK cities like Stockport.[5] They also draw support from middle-class intellectuals and artists like Nick Land, Jordan Peterson, and Renaud Camus. If *Knight of Cups* were reducible to a simple statement, it might be that the most abhorrent form of white privilege is the ability of the privileged to believe they are disenfranchised. But *Knight of Cups* does not wallow in this; instead, Rick (Christian Bale) is led out of abjection by the neo-romantic aesthetics of the film.

Knight of Cups' companion film from Chapter 4, *Somewhere*, similarly deals with the privileged entropy of a male celebrity in Hollywood. Possibly this also shows the sense of disenfranchisement amongst privileged groups but, in the light of 2016, I feel it also represents political apathy—especially that of those living comfortable lives. After all, Rick at least questions why he feels nothing; in *Somewhere*, Johnny (Stephen Dorff) blankly accepts his condition. Before 2016, both these films felt endemic of a cultural landscape drifting into weary ennui. Now, they appear as attempts to resolve the psychological crises of their abject subjects. *Somewhere* is not merely ninety minutes of a father hanging out with his daughter. It is a *romance* wherein a man discovers love.

In 2000, *Ivansxtc* was a technical oddity—notable for its use of high definition digital cameras. Thinking about it now in terms of neo-romanticism, it feels like a prototype. It removes the spectator from their comfort zone by utilising an alienating technology and

[5] Claimed as the city with the highest depression rate in England by *The Guardian* in 2019. Helen Pidd, 'Is this the most depressed place in England', *The Guardian* (6 May 2019), https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/may/06/is-brinnington-stockport-the-most-depressed-place-in-england.

aesthetic, and explicitly references nineteenth-century romanticism with an abundant use of Wagner (and by extension Schopenhauer and Nietzsche). In Chapter 2 I wrote that the film evoked Federico García Lorca's theory of the 'duende': a sentimental and poetic notion that sees impassioned art as always invoking the shadow of death. What I think is necessary when watching these films is an embrace of their melodramatic, even unfashionable, qualities, and a suspension of scepticism and irony. If, hypothetically, the film were released now, the effect would be powerful. Not only does the film reflect the reptilian behaviour of Hollywood agents and stars (still not as bad as what has come to light from #MeToo), but its romanticism is an assault on the absurd rhetoric of the right wing as well as the dehumanising uber-rationality of the centre-left.

This was precisely the issue I took with the metafictional films of Chapter 1: *New Nightmare* and *Adaptation*. Neither film is comfortable with how overtly ludicrous their narratives are. The need to wink ironically at the audience is irresistible—although metafiction is inherently self-aware, so this does not add a great deal. *New Nightmare* demonstrates the power of language and narrative to control aberrant forces. This now feels misguided and outdated in a climate where narratives are the aberrant force, and no one can control them (even if some exploit their chaotic wake). *Adaptation* proposes that any attempt to deviate from hegemonic narrative structures and themes can only be achieved within said mainstream narrative paradigms—thus rendering the attempt and the result futile. It is a despairing film that gives up hope—it feels that it cannot defeat the system of Hollywood. It is what *Inland Empire*, *Somewhere*, and *Knight of Cups* at first appeared to be. But whilst those films do see an alternative mode of production, *Adaptation* only sees the end of days—climaxing as it does with an accelerated parody of happiness.

Looking at writer (and protagonist) Charlie Kaufman's post-*Adaptation* work, one can discern concurrent threads, but also subtle developments. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless*

Mind (Michel Gondry, 2004) creates another melancholic ouroboros as a man (Jim Carrey) and a woman (Kate Winslet) attempt to remove the pain of their failed relationship by erasing their memories of each other. However, at the end of the film they are once again a couple, despite the knowledge of their previous failure (they only know that the relationship failed not why—they have no memory of it). We cannot tell how many times they have started afresh but the implication is that a failure to contend with the trauma results in an endless reliving of it. In *Synecdoche, New York* (Charlie Kaufman, 2008), theatre director Caden (Philip Seymour Hoffman) creates a piece of immersive living theatre in a New York warehouse in an attempt to produce the ultimate in theatrical realism. As the play always falls frustratingly short of its creative aims, it must expand in order to become more life-like. Eventually the play has become so vast as to overcome the metropolis outside of its walls.[6] Conversely, Caden's estranged wife makes miniature paintings which, over the course of the film, become so small as to be unviewable. The film appears, amongst other things, as a warning against artistic realism. Do not hope to find an exact replica of the world in art as you are incapable of fully experiencing either art or the world. Unlike Simondon, who sees great possibilities in art that brings us into a mediated space between artwork and world, Caden strives for a pure, and thus impossible, unmediated experience of life. Hence, his ultimate frustration and destruction. With *Anomalisa* (Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson, 2015) there is a slight shift. Kaufman discards the question of realism from the start; the film is a stop-motion animation. Again, the protagonist, Michael (David Thewlis), is a depressed middle-aged man. Every other character in the film has the same voice actor (Tom Noonan) besides a younger woman (Jennifer Jason Leigh) with whom Michael has an affair whilst on a miserable business trip. Michael finds the 'universal voice' which he encounters at every

[6] There are parallels with the Jorge Luis Borges short story *Del rigor en la ciencia* [*On Exactitude in science*, 1946] where the cartographical skills of an empire have become so precise the only an exactly to scale map of the country is acceptable.

turn suffocating, and even frightening. Yet this is a voice which repeatedly tells Michael that it loves him. Michael rejects this and ends the film at home feeling desperate and outcast. This is certainly an abjection-image film presenting a breakdown, but with the suggestion that if Michael listens to the voice which loves him, he could be on the verge of a positive breakthrough.

Whilst there is a current strain of (financially successful) metafictional filmmaking which remains, as with examples from the 1990s and early 2000s, extremely arch and detached—Tim Miller's *Deadpool* (2016) being a prime example—there are recent metafilms which diverge from this poise. Ari Folman's *The Congress* (2013) features a fictionalised version of the actress Robin Wright (playing herself) selling her digital image rights to a shady studio exec (Danny Huston) to be used in a Ray Kurzweil-esque technological singularity where much of humanity resides in an animated utopian/dystopian reality. Not only is the use of animation to represent altered subjectivities notable, but a scene between Wright and her agent (Harvey Keitel) witnesses him delivering a monologue to provoke her emotional responses for the digitalisation process. His moving speech culminates with his admittance that 'that's when I realised that I'm not your agent, I just love you.' Unlike Michael in *Anomalisa*, Wright is receptive to the declaration of love. Accepting her agent's love infers rejecting his status as her agent. In *The Congress* we are asked to focus on the emotional aspects of the film at the cost of the overtly metafictional elements. Despite privileging our emotional response, the film, according to Anton Bitel, is still capable of 'somehow bringing us closer together while isolating and alienating us all the more'[7] [8]

[7] Bitel, '*The Congress*'.

[8] One might also consider *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (Peter Ramsey, Bob Persichetti and Rodney Rothman, 2018) as a 'healthier' conception of Hollywood metafiction. In this, also animated, film, a variety of 'Spider-Men' from parallel dimensions team up to save the day. Not only does the film promote collectivity over individualism, it also highlights how subjectivity is multivalent and not necessarily consistent with itself. *Spider-Verse* is interested in the closed system of metafiction. Rather, it exploits its animated form and multiverse structure to promote an aesthetic experience which is open to infinite developments and possibilities.

Self-reflexivity has often appeared in Hollywood, and in this thesis, as a concern of white men. Indeed I highlighted how some of the theory I deploy, particularly Deleuze's, has been the focus of criticism from the likes of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as a kind of theoretical colonisation. Looking away from the Hollywood mainstream, we can find filmmakers using self-reflexivity to scrutinise racial representation and prejudice. Joshua Magor is a white South African director. His 2018 film *Siyabonga* [*We Are Thankful*] dramatises a meeting between a budding black actor living in a township, Siyabonga Majola (playing himself), and Magor (also playing himself), who is in the region workshopping ideas for a film. Magor claims that the self-reflexive construction of the film imbues the audience with a degree of critical agency:

> The formal use of a self-reflexive mechanism in the film allowed for me to control certain hierarchies. Specifically allowing for me to collapse the hierarchy that exists between maker and subject. Within the film world, by introducing the presence of the director and revealing certain mechanisms of the filmmaking process I was able to place the 'maker' of the film on a similar hierarchical plane as that of the players/subjects. As a result the notion of the omnipotent string-pulling director is somewhat assuaged and the fact that we have the maker of the film disclosed (within the film itself) gives the audience permission to interrogate/criticise his position.[9]

To an extent we might claim that, like Wes Craven in *New Nightmare*, metafiction is a self-defence mechanism that allows the creator to 'hide' within their creation. Yet Magor seems to sincerely want us to critique his role. The film is constructed of, often static, long takes that invite the viewers to contemplate the images at length. Magor has suggested that this was a deliberate synthesis of his understanding Bazinian theory with self-reflexivity in order to present as passive a director as is possible (although cinematography predicated on long takes naturally requires intention, planning, and skill)—he also performs in the film with his back to the camera.[10] It seems that self-reflexivity always involves certain unresolvable contradictions which stop it from operating quite as 'purely' as Magor intends. However, he

[9] Magor, email to George Crosthwait, 5 April 2019.
[10] Magor.

believes that it can be a tool with which to help with the issue of representation in South African cinema. When questioned on this he replied that 'the issues of race are unavoidable in South Africa so the formal construction of the film was very carefully considered so that the film could allow for constructive discussion. I wished to achieve a certain subversion of power dynamics where the film was led by Siya and I as the director was almost a passenger trying to find the best way to record his passage.'[11] Whilst self-reflexivity operates under a cloud of muddied intentions and interpretations, in some necessary cases it is capable of bringing what is usually hidden (the production behind the film) to the level of primary diegesis.

In the beginning of this dissertation I asked how we might have the capacity to alter Hollywood as a system. Having devoted so much thought to Simondon's ontogenesis, and his various de/reindividuations, throughout this thesis, I now feel that the very concept of Hollywood as a system is not particularly helpful. It would be better, instead, to conceive of Hollywood as a technical milieu, within which countless multitudes of technical-organic assemblages are individuated and deindividuated in constant flux. Hollywood is ephemeral. It only comes into existence when we encounter it (individuate with it or within it). Although it appears monolithic and impregnable in these instances, it is obliterated when we deindividuate with it. It returns to potential/immanence. In this way, Hollywood operates as a metastable milieu. Perhaps it is impossible for one single film to incite total collapse or wholesale change (Bordwell was right!), but each film has within it the *potential* to lead us into subtly alternative ways of individuating within this metastable, technical, milieu. And as I suggested in the conclusion of Chapter 2, it is only in retrospect that we become aware of how a film either altered our subjectivity or altered the artistic or industrial landscape of Hollywood.

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[11] Magor.

New Terminology

Our current age requires new forms of art and expression and, equally, it requires a consideration of how we consume such forms. I have suggested that shoots of this have begun to appear. However, it has been, and remains, something difficult to recognise and process. This is because (trapped in language as we are) we currently lack the vocabulary with which to name and conceptualise these new forms. Throughout this thesis I have suggested some new concepts that might help to think about how cinema can, and does, operate today. Some of the terms I deploy are influenced by Gilbert Simondon—and indeed, his original ideas about individuation are useful for thinking about how we come into being, and how we interact with both people and with technology. Thus, my 'cinematic individuation' explains how viewers and films interact with each other. In previous chapters I have outlined the minutiae of how cinematic individuation operates on both a psychological and theoretical level, but the essential takeaway is that it describes how certain films impact upon us in a simultaneously intellectual and sentimental way. Just as Simondon's social and technical individuations see beings and objects pass on potentials or create new ones, cinematic individuation permits a similar transference.

This process is facilitated by something that first breaks down or assaults the viewer's inbuilt expectations of style and form before rebuilding them through an emotional (romantic) experience. This is how the neo-romanticism proposed at length above works. Again, this can be related back to Simondon. I use the term de/reindividuation as a shorthand for the movement of decoupling and recoupling that occurs when a person undergoes an alteration in their subjectivity.

This trip to new beginnings is so often framed in cinema as an abject experience. I described what I saw as 'abject expressionism'. In a world of abject abasement, trauma, and entropy, we must be prepared to become abject, to abase ourselves, to experience trauma, and to exist in entropy so that we might come out on the other side. In Chapter 3 I explored Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of schizoanalysis. I suggested that life under late capitalism inevitably leads us all to become static drones like Johnny in *Somewhere* (Bodies without Organs). But I proposed that this marked the necessary trip into abjection wherein the breakdown of subjectivity that schizoanalysis describes can happen. There, we pick up the pieces to *express* something productive.

When we hold these ideas in mind—cinematic individuation, abject expressionism, de/reindividuation—we can recognise that the cinema that seeks to destabilise us is not deploying the insidious politics of chaos that govern our current lives. Abjection-image cinema actually aims to undo the abject state which neo-liberal, alt-right, and neoconservative politics, culture, and economics have instilled in us. When we are broken down our vulnerability makes us susceptible to the sentimental or melodramatic experience of neo-romanticism. When right wing politicians and media use emotion as a tool to wield power, art has the capacity to use emotion to counter these forces rather than turn away from it. Afterall, as Lauren Berlant reminds us, 'politics is always emotional. It is a scene where structural antagonisms—genuinely conflicting interests sustaining regimes of power and value—are described in rhetoric that intensifies the fantasy of vulnerable and possible worlds.'[12] Emotion and fantasy, despite their somewhat malign sociopolitical associations, are what we can and should seek in cinema. Therein lies the path out of abjection, to the restoration of subjectivity, via cinematic individuation.

[12] Berlant, 'Trump, or Political Emotions'.

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